EVENT PROGRAMME

BRAHMS TO MONTGOMERY

INTERNATIONAL CONCERT SERIES 2026-27

Thursday, 22 October 2026, 8:00pm

Picture Gallery, Founder's Building

Mebrakh Haughton-Johnson clarinet

Viktor Erik Emanuel piano

There will not be an interval during this evening's event.

Estimated event finish time: 9:15pm

Please no flash photography or visual/audio recording throughout the event.

For news about our future events, please visit **royalholloway.ac.uk/music/events**

EVENT PROGRAMME

WHAT WILL WE HEAR?

James Lee III (b. 1975)
Principal Brothers No. 3

George Gershwin (1898–1937), arr. Cohen
Three Preludes

I. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso
II. Andante con moto e poco rubato
III. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Clarinet Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 120 No. 2

I. Allegro amabile
II. Allegro appassionato
III. Andante con moto - Allegro

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)
Peace

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
Première Rhapsodie

You can also view our event programmes online. Please ask at Box Office for further information.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Our programme notes are written by a team of student volunteers as part of the Concert Management & Artist Personnel Programme, unless otherwise stated.

JAMES LEE III (B. 1975)

Principal Brothers No. 3

The year 2020 has definitely been a very challenging year with many upheavals. During this time of the COVID-19 health crisis, wearing masks, and high racial tensions, I decided to compose four short solo woodwind works for flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon, which represent the core woodwind section in an orchestra. I was inspired to compose these short pieces after I first heard Igor Stravinsky's three short pieces for clarinet, which totals a little more than four minutes in duration. I thought that it would be nice to highlight and honor my African-American male colleagues in the orchestral music world. I wanted to celebrate the fact that they are the principal player in the section of their respective orchestras. The short pieces are as follows: Principal Brother No. 1 for flute solo for Demarre McGill, Principal Flute of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Principal Brother No. 2 for oboe solo for Titus Underwood, Principal Oboe of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, Principal Brother No. 3 for clarinet solo for Anthony McGill, Principal Clarinet of the New York Philharmonic, and Principal Brother No. 4 for bassoon solo for Bryan Young, Principal Bassoon of the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra. These works all begin with notes that are representative of their name; D for Demarre, B for Titus (ti in solfège starting on C), A for Anthony, and Bb for Bryan. There is also a rhythmic figure in the opening measures of each piece, which represent the utterance of their names. All four of these works are rhapsodic in nature with elements of improvisation.

© James Lee III

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937), ARR. COHEN

Three Preludes

The preludes were originally written for piano and were first performed by Gershwin in New York in 1926. George Gershwin's Three Preludes combines the form of classical music with the sounds and rhythms of jazz and blues. They were part of a larger idea to compose 24 preludes in all the major and minor keys, tentatively titled "The Melting Pot", but the project was never completed.

The first prelude is lively and rhythmic, featuring melodies composed of blue notes, syncopation and punchy accents. The second prelude is slower and more expressive. Gershwin describes it as "a sort of blues lullaby." The clarinet plays a vocal-like melody while accompanied by the piano, creating a tender, reflective mood filled with the influences of blues music. The third prelude is fast and energetic, often described as the "Spanish Prelude," because of its Spanish-inspired character. The clarinet and piano furiously exchange musical phrases, the syncopated accents and virtuosic passages, building towards an exciting conclusion. All together, these three preludes showcase Gershwin's distinct compositional voice: unmistakable jazz and blues inflections and harmonic colours, embellishing a foundationally classical form.

— Mia Thacker and Ella Yu

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Clarinet Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 120 No. 2

After writing his last sonata in 1888 (the Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op, 108), Brahms declared to his friends and publishers that he would retire as a composer. However, after witnessing a performance from the German clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld (whom he called the greatest wind player in the world), he felt so inspired that he deferred his retirement long enough to write four final works featuring the clarinet as the leading instrument.

The Sonata in E-flat, Op. 120, No. 2 is the second of two sonatas Brahms then wrote for the clarinet and piano. They are both rich in texture, song-like in their clarinet-writing, and incredibly far-removed

from the dramatic flair that made the composer's Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor so famous. In fact, the first movement of the Clarinet Sonata No. 2 is so dissimilar, that it pervades such a glowing warmth that perfectly matches the title 'allegro amabile,' with its sweet, tender and charming nature of writing. The middle movement is a lightly swaying scherzo that was typical of Brahms's intermezzi both in his chamber works and late solo piano pieces. Interestingly, the trio section, initially takes a more sombre form, sounding rather hymn-like, before returning to the initial theme; however, adapted, to capture the solemnity of the trio. The finale of theme and variations correspondingly begins with the same glowing warmth of the first movement. Here, through the development of a gentle theme, an intimate dialogue between clarinet and piano is shared, ultimately leading to a triumphant coda.

— Mia Thacker and Ella Yu

JESSIE MONTGOMERY (B. 1981)

Peace

Written just a month after the Great Sadness of the first quarantine orders due to COVID-19, facing the shock felt by the whole globe as well as personal crisis, I find myself struggling to define what actually brings me joy. And I'm at a stage of making peace with sadness as it comes and goes like any other emotion. I'm learning to observe sadness for the first time not as a negative emotion, but as a necessary dynamic to the human experience.

© Jessie Montgomery

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 – 1918)

Premiere Rhapsodie

In 1909, the director of Paris Conservatory requested that Claude Debussy join the Conseil supérieur (governing board), meaning he was obligated to often officiate as a composer and adjudicator. Then, in 1910, Debussy was asked to write two pieces to be performed by clarinet students for a routine competition as, at the time, he was serving with the clarinet jury. However, when being performed,

Debussy found the majority of players performing the Rhapsodie unsatisfactory, with the eventual winner playing it “by heart”, as if it were improvised; as Debussy intended when he wrote it.

The piece opens with a rather calming atmosphere, with piano in the accompaniment, adding gentle bars of momentum, while the clarinet plays, sweet but penetrating themes that gradually become more energetic. As is typical of Debussy’s works, the clarinet is played with a more improvisatory feel (also common to impressionist music). As the piece progresses, both clarinet and piano develop into more rapid passages and dance-like rhythms. All these virtuosic elements eventually weave seamlessly into a breathless, but astounding finale.

Over 100 years since it was first written, Premiere Rhapsodie is now known as one of the most cherished clarinet works ever written. Despite being conceived as a piece for examination and competition, the Rhapsody features an impressionistic poeticness that stands uniquely within clarinet literature, leaving it described by Debussy himself as “one of the most immediately pleasing pieces I have ever written.”

— Mia Thacker and Ella Yu

OUR PERFORMERS



MEBRAKH HAUGHTON-JOHNSON
CLARINET

Mebrakh Haughton-Johnson is a British clarinettist rapidly establishing himself as a distinctive voice on the international stage. Known for his fearless programming, exceptional versatility and compelling communication, he brings together classical masterworks, contemporary music and global influences to create concerts that resonate with today's audiences. He has performed at many of the world's most prestigious venues and festivals, including Wigmore Hall, Kings Place, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Verbier Festival, Adelaide Festival and the Edinburgh International Festival, and made his American concerto debut in 2024 with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra. Recent and forthcoming highlights include appearances at Harrogate International Festival, St George's Bristol, The Athenaeum, the University of Birmingham and Whittington Music Festival, as well as performances of Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 2 with St Bart's Chamber Orchestra. A First-Class graduate of the Royal College of Music and alumnus of The Juilliard School, Mebrakh studied with some of the world's leading clarinettists, including Anthony McGill, and is emerging as one of the most exciting and original musicians of his generation.

VIKTOR ERIK EMANUEL
PIANO

Born in Stockholm to an Indonesian father and a Swedish mother, Viktor Erik Emanuel started playing the piano at the age of ten. After attending one of the foremost specialist music schools in Sweden and winning prizes in several piano competitions, he moved to London in 2004 to pursue conservatoire-level studies under the tutelage of Caroline Palmer and Paul Roberts at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Viktor continued his musical education with Tatiana Sarkissova at the Royal Academy of Music, from which he graduated with a Master of Arts in Piano Performance as well as the LRAM Teaching Diploma.

www.viktorerikemanuel.com

Music at Royal Holloway

Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

JAZZ SESSION

IRENE SERRA X ISQ

29 October 2026, 8.00pm

Windsor Building Auditorium

For over two decades, vocalist and songwriter Irene Serra has been quietly carving out a singular space within the UK's contemporary music landscape. ISQ is her original compositional project -a moniker under which she writes and shapes music that remains something of a word-of-mouth discovery.

£15 - FREE

Concessions available; Free for students and staff at Royal Holloway

BOOK YOUR TICKET NOW

ROYALHOLLOWAY.AC.UK/MUSIC/EVENTS

