



EVENT PROGRAMME

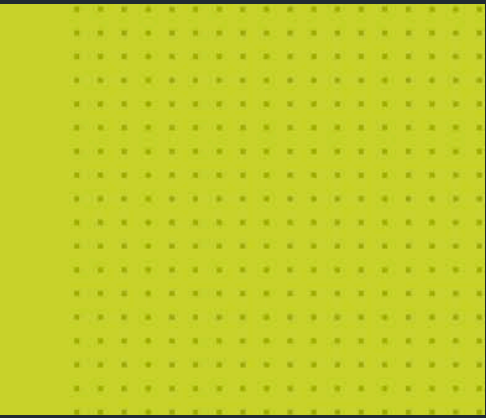
INTERNATIONAL
CONCERT SERIES
2025-2026

Department of Music

Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

**ROYALHOLLOWAY.AC.UK/
MUSIC/EVENTS**





DISCOVER **VOX HUMANA: THE 2025-26 INTERNATIONAL CONCERT SERIES AT ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON. A YEAR OF WORLD-CLASS MUSIC DEDICATED TO THE POWER OF THE HUMAN VOICE, CONTINUING A CELEBRATED VOCAL TRADITION THAT BEGAN IN 1886.**

This season, curated by Dr Nathan James Dearden in his 10th year, celebrates two major milestones: the 20th anniversary of Rupert Gough as Director of Choral Music, whose leadership has shaped the acclaimed Choir of Royal Holloway, defining choral excellence at the university, and the upcoming launch of the Choral Academy in May 2026. This legacy inspires a diverse programme - from intimate solo song, transcriptions for violin, guitar, to soprano saxophone, to dramatic scenas, orchestral vocalise, folk explorations, and the collective power of choral music - showcasing the breadth and depth of the human voice.

THE ART OF SONG (AND MORE)

We are proud to continue our partnerships with the London Mozart Players and the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT), and to welcome world-class artists including the sublime soprano Ruby Hughes, pianist Huw Watkins, the ground-breaking Emily Francis Trio, and the peerless vocal ensemble VOCES8. The series also shines a light on the phenomenal rising stars of our time: saxophonist Rob Burton, pianist Mark Rogers, Duo Melus, and American mezzo-soprano Hayley Meth.

CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY

Most proudly, we provide a platform for our own extraordinary alumni, welcoming back trad singer and uilleann piper Seb Stone, operatic tenor Thomas Elwin, and debut the exciting new vocal choir, Omnium Ensemble, under the direction of Olivia Earl.

The 2025-26 International Concert Series at Royal Holloway promises an exciting line-up of world-class performances, showcasing renowned musicians and rising talents from around the globe, and the community of students and researchers right here at the University. Set within our stunning campus, the series brings together a wide range of genres, from classical and jazz to contemporary and global music, offering something for every taste.

We look forward to welcoming you and showcasing the exceptional musical life that makes Royal Holloway so special.

Dr Nathan James Dearden

Curator of the International Concert Series and Arts Festivals



EVENT PROGRAMME

AN EVENING WITH ROYAL HOLLOWAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Windsor Building Auditorium

with

Royal Holloway Symphony Orchestra

Jason Fan Piano (Concerto Competition Winner
2025)

Rebecca Miller Conductor

EVENT PROGRAMME

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Cuban Overture

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Piano Concerto in G major, M.83

SHORT BREAK

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88

There will a short rest break during this evening's event

Estimated event finish time: 10.00pm

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

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

PROGRAMME NOTES

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

Cuban Overture

The gap separating popular music from so-called serious music seems to have become a yawning abyss in recent times, but for George Gershwin it barely existed. His natural bent was, of course, for popular music: at the age of fifteen, the earliest legally permissible age at the time, he dropped out of high school to become a song-plugger in Tin Pan Alley. By the time he was in his early twenties he was an established composer with several wildly successful hit tunes and a number of Broadway shows to his credit. Nevertheless, throughout his tragically short life, he never lost his burning ambition to be taken seriously as a serious composer, and he worked tirelessly to improve his craft and to learn from the most erudite musicians of his time. That his unique genius was up to the task of succeeding in both fields and in actually bringing them together is demonstrated by every work on today's programme.

The Cuban Overture had its genesis in a trip to Havana which Gershwin took in February 1932 with several friends, including Bennet Cerf (of Random House publishing fame) and the financier Emil Mosbacher. Havana was of course famous for its nightlife and, as this was to be a bachelor's trip, George's brother Ira, a respectably married man, stayed at home. Among the many delights that Gershwin savoured on the trip were the fascinating irregular rhythms and exotic harmonies of Cuban popular music, which he found intoxicating. Always learning and absorbing new musical ideas, Gershwin went so far as to buy some native percussion instruments, including maracas, bongos, claves and a gourd. Safely back home in New York, he set about capturing this sound in a work called Rumba, which was premiered in the first ever all-Gershwin concert, presented in August by the New York Philharmonic in Lewisohn Stadium before a crowd of more than 17,000. It was the first time the Philharmonic had ever devoted an entire programme to the music of a living composer, providing Gershwin with what he called "the most exciting night I have ever had".

During this period of his career, Gershwin was studying music theory with

a highly learned Russian-born musician named Joseph Schillinger, who had devised a kind of mathematical system designed to help composers create rhythms and thematic ideas. Among his other students were such other icons of popular music as Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman. Gershwin eagerly used some of Schillinger's techniques in his Cuban work as part of his continuing effort at improving his technique as he strove for respectability as a serious composer. For a concert three months after the outdoor Lewisohn programme at the Metropolitan Opera, he renamed the work Cuban Overture, certainly a more "respectable" title and one which, as he himself put it, gave "a more just idea of the character and intent of the music".

The overture is in what musicians call three-part or ABA form. The outer fast sections feature exhilarating dance rhythms, hints of actual Latin popular tunes and brilliant use of the percussion section, including the native instruments that Gershwin bought himself and which, according to an indication in the score, should be prominently displayed on stage. The slower middle section offers striking contrast with its hauntingly melancholy mood. As immediately moving and accessible as this section is, it is interesting to read Gershwin's own highly technical description of it as "a gradually developing canon in a polytonal manner ... with a climax based on an ostinato of the theme in the canon". In addition to proving that he could hold his own with the most high-falutin' writers of programme notes, Gershwin shows that he is the master of some of the most difficult and intellectual of musical techniques. The entire overture is a remarkable tribute to Gershwin's ability to write music that is both immediately accessible and yet skilfully and beautifully crafted.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Piano Concerto in G major, M.83

1. Allegramente
2. Adagio assai
3. Presto

Whack! It would be hard to imagine a more provocative opening to a piece of music: a whip cracks, the violins snap their strings in pizzicato, and the piercing melody of the piccolo seems to come straight from the fairground. Trumpets, timpani and cymbals soon assume prominent roles – yet a

lyrical secondary theme also emerges, tinged with the blues. Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G major is rhythmically electrifying, thrillingly modern and at the same time wonderfully elegant. *Divertissement* was the working title, for the composer initially intended to write a work of light entertainment – but in the end he produced one of the most sophisticated scores ever composed for piano and orchestra.

The concerto is dedicated to Marguerite Long, who gave the première in 1932 at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, after the composer was forced to abandon his plan to play the solo part himself: it had simply proved too demanding for his own fingers. He did, however, take to the stage that evening as the conductor.

The G major concerto is Ravel's final contribution to the instrument that was at the heart of his creative output. At the age of 18, he had already published a *Sérénade grotesque*; milestones of the solo piano repertoire include the dazzlingly virtuosic cycles *Miroirs* and *Gaspard de la nuit*. With the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, Ravel brought the waltz into the 20th century, while *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is both a homage to the French Baroque composer François Couperin and an exploration of the viability of traditional formal models for the modern age.

In 1928, Ravel began work on two pieces for piano and orchestra. The first to be completed was the Concerto for the Left Hand, commissioned by the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost an arm in the First World War. This was followed by the G major concerto, lighter in mood and above all shaped by the impressions Ravel gathered during a tour of the United States in 1928. After its spectacular opening, the first movement remains consistently urban and avant-garde; the composer allows neither himself nor his soloist any indulgence in sentimentality. The blue notes of the second theme are swiftly brushed aside, and in the cadenza – announced by a misty harp solo – the piano remains as noncommittal as a languid lady deflecting the advances of her admirers. With renewed drive, the glamorous sound of the city pushes back into the foreground.

The slow movement leads from the New World back to Paris. The *Adagio assai* opens with an extended piano monologue; almost a third of the movement's duration passes before the orchestra enters for the first time. Here, a modern metropolitan melancholic seems to be strolling through

the streets of the French capital, lost in thought, moving in an exceptionally slow waltz step. Only hesitantly does he engage in dialogue with the woodwinds, above all with the cor anglais. The ending remains unresolved, as the bittersweet movement fades away on a gently oscillating trill.

The Presto becomes a homage to New York's creative frenzy. Jazz returns, with shrill clarinet runs and trombone glissandi. Fragmentary snatches of marching music appear, ironically distorted, amid the breathless rush of sound, while the pianist turns into a percussionist, hammering the strings of his instrument in breakneck passagework. After just four minutes, the finale is already over: in the Big Apple, no one has time for lengthy discourse.

ANTONIN DVORAK (1841-1904)

Symphony No.8 in G major, Op. 88

1. Allegro con brio
2. Adagio
3. Allegretto grazioso - molto vivace
4. Allegro, ma non troppo

In 1889, Dvořák had two more symphonies left to write, plus a cello concerto and a series of symphonic poems. Twelve years earlier, Brahms had championed Dvořák's music (especially the Moravian Duets), leading to the international success of the Slavonic Dances and securing Fritz Simrock as the publisher for the Czech composer's music. Ironically, the G-major Symphony was not published by Simrock, whose insulting offer of merely one-sixth of the fee paid for the D-minor Symphony (No. 7, Op. 70) was refused by the composer. Dvořák had recently become quite popular in England, and the G-major Symphony was published in that country by Novello in 1892.

Despite occasional dramatic outbursts, the predominant tone of the Eighth Symphony is one of bucolic euphoria, the sheer joy of being alive in a world of natural wonders. The composer's biographer Otakar Šourek explains that Dvořák had "[h]is own garden in Vysoká [the state-sponsored retreat in southern Bohemia], which he loved 'like the divine art

itself', and the fields and woods through which he wandered.... [These were] a welcome refuge, bringing him not only peace and fresh vigour of mind, but happy inspiration for new creative work. In communion with Nature, in the harmony of its voices and the pulsating rhythms of its life, in the beauty of its changing moods and aspects, his thoughts came more freely.... Here he absorbed poetical impressions and moods, here he rejoiced in life and grieved in its inevitable decay, here he indulged in philosophical reflections on the substance and meaning of the interrelation between Nature and life."

Dvořák, it could be said, was reflecting a worldview in which "intelligent design" is the source of both wonderment and woe. The opening of the Eighth Symphony's first movement, a serious and rather sombre chorale for low strings, gives way quickly to an audacious flute solo. Without ever subduing the dramatic element, Dvořák gives free reign to the poetic side of his nature through the ensuing movements of this beloved score, from the often melancholy rhetoric of the Adagio to the folk-flavoured, waltz-like Allegretto grazioso and the invigorating theme and variations of the rousing finale.

Over the course of his career, Dvořák composed in many genres, although it was as an opera composer that he most wished for success. Having earlier turned from his overtly Wagnerian sympathies to a more "absolute" formal path, Dvořák had, by the time he was about to produce his G-major Symphony, entered another new phase. In this work, he relied less on structural rigor and more on the immediate appeal of more "pictorial" elements, making eloquent use of the regular juxtaposition of contrasting sections in major and minor keys. This new approach to musical form would lead eventually to those symphonic poems that capped his orchestral catalogue in 1896.

THE PERFORMERS

ROYAL HOLLOWAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Led by internationally-acclaimed conductor Rebecca Miller, the Royal Holloway Symphony Orchestra meets weekly, giving three concerts per year in the Windsor Auditorium. The orchestra endeavours to create a lively, challenging, and social basis for orchestral life at Royal Holloway and comprises students from across the university. They also participate in side-by-side programmes with professional musicians, and have previously through our unique partnership with the Chiltern Music Academy.

In 2015, the orchestra performed alongside the London Philharmonic Orchestra, at the Magna Carta 800 celebration in Runnymede, in the presence of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Duke of Edinburgh, Prince William Duke of Cambridge, and former Prime Minister David Cameron.

The orchestra meets on Wednesday evenings, where some weekly rehearsals are used for special workshops, reading sessions, 'come and conduct' sessions, and other activities that will serve to enhance orchestral training, complement repertoire, and enrich the orchestral life at Royal Holloway. Sectionals take place throughout the year, led by members of our Instrumental Faculty, and professional orchestral coaches from members of the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.



WHO'S WHO

ROYAL HOLLOWAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For more information about this music group, please search for **@rhysymphonyorchestra** on social media

Violin 1

Nicole Yuen *
James Tretheway
Christopher Bacon *
Rachel Pankhurst
Lily Thompson
Catherine McAlpine
Paul Kam
Joseph McCarthy
Tristan Hail
Luca Parr

Violin 2

Phedra Low *
Livia Domaingue *
Hannah Lam
Andreas Karapanagiotidis
Elodie Fifield
Solveiga Urbanaviciute
Terry Chen
Winston Seng Ung

Viola

Laura Field *
Harry Aldridge *
Frederik Simmen
Poppy Shingler
Maisie Pearce
Isobel Wroe
Phoebe Canell

Cello

Naoki Aso *
Kian Jan-Dickens

Evelyn Pong

Bella Hughes
Claudia Buchanan
Jasmine Akibo-Betts
Jocelyn Hails
Niamh Sherwood
Thomas Homer

Double Bass

Joseph Straker ^
Owen Morgan
Owen Ward

Flute

Gwendolyn
Schneider *
Klara Sweeney
Aleksandar Blanus
Iris-Amelia Davies
Chiara Mankiewicz

Oboe

Katherine Pinnell
Marko Blanus

Clarinet

Ben Hall
Claudia Smith
Charlotte Vosper
Josephine Edwards

Bassoon

Anjeli Valydon *
Luke Passmore*
Rosina Murray

French Horn

Josephine Palmer *
Joshua Davis *
Kerin Black ^
Arran Litster

Trumpet

James McPherson *
Marilla Evans
Katharine Last
Peter So

Trombone

Catriona McIntosh
Lara Casula
Myles Muston

Tuba

Owen Knott

Harp

Charlotte Farrugia

Percussion

Dusan Novakovic
Lena Gore
Joshua Li
Phoebe Bonnar
Theo Wolstenholme
Reece Walker

*Denotes Orchestral
Scholar

^Denotes guest player

JASON FAN

PIANO

“A student with real potential, with a compelling musicality and advanced level of performance”

“Crazy in musical energy, not too indulgent in presentation”

- quotes from his teachers

Hong Kong born pianist, Jason Fan, is currently a 2nd year music student at Royal Holloway, University of London, where he receives tuition and mentorship from internationally acclaimed pianist Ms. Helen Leek and with Dr. Helen Cha during Jason’s time in Hong Kong. Jason performs frequently as a solo and chamber musician across both Hong Kong and the UK. He also works closely with members of RHSO, participating in accompaniments for their fundraiser concerts. He is also active in multiple student groups in Royal Holloway, performing with Royal Holloway Strings Society, Royal Holloway Keys Society, and Royal Holloway Conductors’ Collective.

In recent years, Jason is also recognised by various competitions and music festivals. Particularly, he is the winner of the Royal Holloway Concerto Competition, romantic class special prize winner of Woking Music Festival Piano, the Bach class winner of the Woking Music Festival where he was invited back as a performer.

In pursuit for higher understanding of his instrument, he once worked with a local piano technician to study the pianos’ mechanism, where he obtained a strong understanding in piano tuning.

Jason also takes interest in partaking in different non musical endeavours to enrich his musical depths. He attempts to find inner peace during episodes of chaos and emotional depth in mundane activities.



REBECCA MILLER

CONDUCTOR



California-born conductor Rebecca Miller has earned an international reputation for her compelling, insightful, and energetic presence on the podium and for her ability to communicate with audiences of all ages. Recent guest-conducting includes the Kuopio Symphony Orchestra, Västerås Sinfonietta, DalaSinfoniettan, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, New Haven Symphony Orchestra, Gävle Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, The Orchestra Now, The Bard Music Festival, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, London Mozart Players, London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, City of London Sinfonia, National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional de Mexico, and at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall. Following her debut with the Uppsala Chamber Orchestra in Sweden, she was immediately re-invited and appointed Chief Conductor, a post which she held from 2019-2023.

In previous seasons, Rebecca has guest-conducted the Houston Symphony, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Reno Philharmonic, Bakersfield Symphony, Santa Cruz Symphony, Chicago College of the Performing Arts, Huntsville Symphony, Williamsport Symphony, and Musiq Houston, and with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra in Israel. Firstprize winner in the Eduardo Mata International Conducting Competition, she has conducted throughout Mexico, including repeated engagements with the Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional and Orquesta Filarmonica del UNAM, and the state orchestras of Yucatan, Aguascalientes, and Sinaloa. In 2017, Rebecca was also featured in the Bruno Walter National Conductors Preview with the Nashville Symphony.

Rebecca's discography includes CDs with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (CPE Bach Symphonies / Signum Records, which made the final shortlist for a 2014 Gramophone Award), with the BBC Concert Orchestra (Henry Hadley Orchestral works / Dutton Epoch), with the BBC Scottish Symphony (piano concertos by Amy Beach, Dorothy Howell, Cecil Chaminade / Hyperion Records), and three CDs with the Royal Northern Sinfonia (Haydn Symphonies / Signum Records; George Frederick Bristow's 'Jullien Symphony' / New World Records; Concertos by Aaron Jay Kernis / Signum Records).

Rebecca is passionate about her work with young musicians – she has recently started regular partnerships with the National Children's Orchestra and the with the London Symphony Orchestra Discovery, and previously worked with the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, NYO Wales, and NYOGB, with the Chicago College of the Performing Arts, and with the National Youth Orchestra of Venezuela (Teresa Carreño), much to the acclaim of its late founder José Antonio Abreu. She was conductor at the Royal Academy of Music's Junior Department for many years, where she formed the groundbreaking and unique JA Classical Orchestra, and works regularly with the Southbank Sinfonia in London, where she was Associate Conductor for three years.

As Director of Orchestras at Royal Holloway University of London, she has been widely acclaimed for building the orchestral programme to new heights – starting an orchestral scholarship programme, initiating a side-by-side programme with the London Mozart Players, securing high-profile engagements (including 'Magna Carta 800 at Runnymede' a project with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Temple Church Choir, performed in the the presence of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and 4000 dignitaries and honoured guests), and establishing a new initiative called 'Music +', which aims to build bridges through music with interdepartmental projects and interdisciplinary research.

Previously, Rebecca served as Resident Conductor of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and American Conducting Fellow of The Houston Symphony, and Assistant Conductor of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. She holds a B.Mus. in Piano Performance from Oberlin Conservatory, an M.Mus in Orchestral Conducting from Northwestern University, and for two years was the Paul Woodhouse Junior Fellow in Orchestral Conducting at London's Royal College of Music.

rebeccamiller.net



Department of Music

Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

THE PLATFORM SERIES SPRING 2026

We are pleased to continue our platform for the community at the Department of Music to share their world-class talents.

Pictures at our Exhibition with Brass Band

24 March 2026

Swing into Spring with Undergraduated

26 March 2026



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AND TO BOOK YOUR TICKETS**
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