



Academy of
St Mary-le-Bow

Shostakovich

Symphony No. 5
in D minor, Op. 47

Stravinsky

Symphony in Three Movements

Copland

Fanfare for the Common Man

Conductor Alex Fryer

4 October 2026 – 6pm

Duke's Hall, Marylebone Rd NW1 5HT

Tickets £22 Adult, £15 Under 30 | www.academyofstmarylebow.com

In Memory of the Reverend George Bush

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the memory of the Reverend George Bush, who sadly passed away on Saturday, 26th September. George was Rector at St Mary-le-Bow when the orchestra was founded in 2016, and his generosity in allowing us to make our home there made it possible for the orchestra to come into existence and flourish. He was a huge supporter of the orchestra, attending concerts both in and away from St Mary-le-Bow, always taking an interest in our plans, keeping a watchful eye on our finances and assisting us with fundraising. George loved music, and this showed in his commitment not only to the Academy but also to other aspects of musical life at St Mary-le-Bow. The whole orchestra is indebted to George. We are so grateful for the ten years of musical joy that everyone involved has experienced, and none of that would have existed without his generosity and support.

Welcome

Good evening and welcome to the stunning Duke's Hall, here at the Royal Academy of Music for this evening's concert. Tonight is the first concert in the orchestra's 10th anniversary season; I can't believe it's been a decade since our launch concert back in August 2016, and what a decade it's been. Over the past ten years, the orchestra has played a huge part in my life - I've conducted over 30 of our 50 concerts, and along the way I've met people I now consider some of my closest friends. I'll save the really sentimental stuff for our February concert, which is our official anniversary concert, but I would like to start the season with a big thank you to all the people who have put in work behind the scenes to make it all happen.

To mark our 10th anniversary year, we are opening every concert in the season with a fanfare, and we start tonight with perhaps one of the most recognisable, Copland's homage to the common man. The centrepiece to our first concert of the season is Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, which seemed appropriately epic in magnitude to help us mark this ten-year milestone. Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* completes our programme, and this is a personal favourite of mine (a reward I've allowed myself for ten years of service!). It was only by chance that all the pieces in tonight's programme were written in response to political events of the 1930s and 1940s: the Copland explicitly honouring Americans who made sacrifices during the Second World War, the Stravinsky often considered a musical reaction to the same war, and the Shostakovich a subversive response to Stalin's oppressive communist regime in Russia. Despite the works all being written between 80 and 90 years ago, in an ever more unstable global political landscape, they still have resonance today. Shostakovich wrote his Fifth Symphony in 1937, but the use of grandiose pomp to placate a despotic leader doesn't seem out of place in the modern world – neither does the idea of a leader causing great suffering to their own people for the advancement of a political agenda.

As the orchestra embarks on its 10th season, we're thrilled to announce that we have become a registered charity, which will greatly assist with our fundraising efforts. As part of our anniversary, we are encouraging audience members (especially friends and family of players) to become Friends or Patrons of the orchestra to help support our concerts this season and to help secure our future financial stability. If you'd like to support the orchestra with either a one-off donation as part of our 10th anniversary appeal or one of our annual memberships, take a look at the final page of this programme. I do hope you enjoy the concert, and that you can join us for some of the other exciting concerts we have lined up as part of our 10th anniversary season.

Alex Fryer

(Principal Conductor and Artistic Director, Academy of St Mary-le-Bow)

Programme

Fanfare for the Common Man

Aaron Copland
(1900-1990)

Symphony in Three Movements

Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

- I. Overture: Allegro
- II. Andante; Interlude: L'istesso tempo
- III. Con moto

- Interval -

Symphony No. 5
in D minor, Op. 47

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

- I. Moderato
- II. Allegretto
- III. Largo
- IV. Allegro non troppo

We kindly ask that audience members refrain from filming or photographing the performance.

The Royal Academy of Music bar is open before and after the concert, and during the interval.

Programme Notes

Copland

Fanfare for the Common Man

Aaron Copland was a defining voice of twentieth-century American music. His clear textures and spacious harmonies became synonymous with the vast landscapes and pioneering spirit of the United States, establishing a musical language that was both distinctly American and immediately accessible.

Fanfare for the Common Man was written during the Second World War, following a commission from conductor Eugene Goossens and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Goossens had invited a number of American composers to write short fanfares to open orchestral concerts during the 1942–43 season, providing what he hoped would be stirring contributions to the war effort.

While many of the proposed titles celebrated soldiers, sailors, and airmen, Copland chose instead to honour the ordinary citizen. The title was inspired in part by a 1942 speech given by American Vice President Henry A. Wallace, who spoke of the coming “Century of the Common Man”.

Scored exclusively for brass and percussion, the fanfare achieves a remarkable sense of scale from relatively simple materials. It opens not with the brass, but with a rumbling percussion motif. Against this stark background, the trumpets introduce the fanfare’s broad principal theme, its wide intervals and deliberate pace giving the melody a dignified, heroic solemnity. There is no virtuosic display for its own sake and no individual protagonist. Instead, the work’s power lies in its simplicity and restraint. From silence, a single musical voice emerges and is joined by others until the entire ensemble speaks together. In this way, Copland creates a musical tribute not to generals or political leaders, but to the quiet courage, resilience, and dignity of ordinary people.

Stravinsky

Symphony in Three Movements

Igor Stravinsky was one of the most influential composers of the twentieth century, achieving international recognition through his collaborations with the Ballets Russes, with works including *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*. Over the course of his long career, his compositional style underwent several dramatic transformations, moving from the vivid colours and rhythmic violence of his early ballets to the clarity of neoclassicism and, later, serial composition.

Stravinsky began his *Symphony in Three Movements* in 1942, by which time he had settled in the United States. Commissioned by the Philharmonic Symphony Society of New York, the work was completed in 1945 and first performed at Carnegie Hall on 24 January 1946.

Stravinsky often resisted the idea of ‘programmatic’ music that expresses a specific story. However, he referred to this work as his “war symphony”, confessing that its atmosphere was shaped by newsreels and documentary footage of the Second World War. Images of mechanised warfare, marching soldiers, and the shifting course of the conflict appear to lie behind the music’s restless rhythmic energy and sudden, violent contrasts.

The symphony also grew from several abandoned projects. The prominent piano writing in the first movement originated in sketches for a piano concerto, while the harp-dominated second movement developed from music intended for a film adaptation of *The Song of Bernadette*. The final movement brings piano and harp together, uniting the contrasting sound worlds of the preceding movements.

The first movement opens with an explosive upward rush, immediately establishing a mood of conflict and instability. Jagged rhythms, mechanical repetition, and sharply accented chords propel the music forward. Fleeting moments of calm are repeatedly swept aside by music of relentless energy.

The central *Andante* offers a striking contrast. Led by the harp and woodwind, it is more transparent and restrained, with graceful melodic lines and an almost dreamlike atmosphere. Yet the movement never feels entirely secure. Beneath its elegance lies a sense of unease, and a brief interlude leads without pause into the finale.

The third movement restores the violence of the opening. Stravinsky’s characteristic musical language is present throughout: shifting accents, irregular rhythms, pungent harmonies, and brilliantly contrasted blocks of orchestral sound. Heavy marching figures and pounding repeated rhythms evoke, in Stravinsky’s own words, “goose-stepping soldiers” and the rise of the Allied forces, with the music gradually gathering momentum towards a conclusion of increasing brilliance and force. However, Stravinsky seemed to want to leave the listener’s interpretation open, stating: “In spite of what I have said, the Symphony is not programmatic. Composers combine notes. That is all. How and in what form the things of this world are impressed upon their music is not for them to say.”

Shostakovich

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47

Dmitri Shostakovich was one of the most important and complex musical voices of the Soviet era. A brilliant pianist and composer, he achieved international recognition while still in his twenties. His career, however, unfolded under a political system in which artistic success offered no guarantee of personal safety. Throughout his life, he was forced to negotiate a precarious path between creative independence and the demands of the Soviet state.

In January 1936, Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, previously one of his greatest successes, was condemned in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*. The anonymous article attacked the opera as formalist and chaotic, warning ominously that such artistic

behaviour “may end badly”. Performances of Shostakovich’s music declined, and the composer withdrew his experimental Fourth Symphony before its planned premiere.

Against this background, Shostakovich composed his Fifth Symphony during the spring and summer of 1937. The work was presented publicly as “a Soviet artist’s creative response to justified criticism”, suggesting that the composer had acknowledged his errors and returned to a clearer, more accessible musical style. Its first performance took place in Leningrad on 21 November 1937, when Yevgeny Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra. The premiere was an extraordinary success.

Yet the symphony’s apparent message of repentance and triumph is far from straightforward. Its four movements travel from D minor to D major and appear to follow a traditional journey from darkness into light. Beneath this outwardly conventional structure, however, lie grief, anxiety, grotesque humour, and an ambiguous final celebration. Whether that conclusion represents genuine victory, bitter irony, or survival under pressure has remained one of the central questions surrounding the work.

The first movement opens with a severe, sharply dotted figure in the strings. A quieter, wandering melody follows, but the atmosphere remains tense and uncertain. As the music develops, fragments of these ideas are transformed into a brutal march, driven by piano, percussion, and low brass. The movement eventually retreats from this terrifying climax, ending in an atmosphere of isolation and uneasy calm.

The second movement is a grotesque scherzo, its heavy rhythms suggesting a distorted waltz or rustic dance. Moments of wit and apparent lightness are repeatedly undercut by coarse orchestral colours, abrupt changes of character, and deliberate exaggeration. What begins as entertainment gradually takes on the quality of a forced or uncomfortable performance. At the emotional heart of the symphony lies the Largo. Shostakovich removes the brass entirely and divides the strings into multiple parts, creating a dark, richly layered sonority. Long, lamenting melodies unfold with the character of a wordless funeral song, while exposed woodwind solos intensify the music’s sense of private grief. The movement builds towards a devastating climax before fading into a fragile stillness.

Without pause, the finale erupts in a blaze of brass and percussion. Its opening march initially appears confident and heroic, but this is repeatedly interrupted and undermined by quieter, more introspective passages. In the final minutes of the symphony, the jubilant principal theme returns in D major, hammered out over insistent repeated notes with overwhelming force. Yet despite this seemingly triumphant ending, the extreme dynamics and relentless strain of the repeated notes in the wind and strings suggest that the victory is perhaps not all it seems on the surface. The listener is left suspended between genuine celebration and forced triumph: a victory demanded by authority, yet haunted by experiences that could not safely be expressed in words.

Alex Fryer

Conductor

Alex is a versatile musician enjoying a varied freelance career as a conductor, oboist, singer and educator. Alex studied at The Royal College of Music, London where he graduated with a Master's in oboe performance with distinction, having previously been awarded a First-Class degree in Music from the University of Southampton. In 2019 he joined Sinfonia Smith Square (formerly Southbank Sinfonia) as an oboist for a year-long orchestral fellowship, which included performances at the BBC Proms and broadcasts on BBC Radio 3.

As a conductor, Alex is the Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow, as well as a regular guest conductor with the Hertfordshire Chamber Orchestra. He has worked with many other ensembles including Southbank Sinfonia, Southern Sinfonia, the Cantus Ensemble and Cambridge Youth Opera, the New Cambridge Symphony Orchestra as well as both the University Symphony and Chamber Orchestras at Southampton. Alex enjoys devising interesting and original programmes and finding new ways of presenting traditional repertoire.

Alex is a freelance Music Leader/Presenter and a passionate music educator. He has worked on education projects alongside the Royal Opera House, Sinfonia Smith Square and The Bridge at Waterloo. Alex trained in education and participation work on the Pathway Scheme with Wigmore Hall Learning and on the Trainee Music Leader Scheme with Spitalfields Music. Alex currently coaches young musicians with the Music in Secondary Schools Trust and is an Arts Creative Learning Specialist working in primary schools.

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow is a unique ensemble of outstanding musicians. Brought together by their love of high-quality orchestral music-making, members of the orchestra have studied at leading conservatoires or universities, been part of prestigious organisations such as the National Youth Orchestra, or previously worked as professional orchestral players, but now professionally pursue careers outside music. The ensemble provides these players with the opportunity to keep making orchestral music to the highest standard with like-minded players.

The orchestra ensemble performs around six major concerts a year across the city and holds a residency at the historic church of St Mary-le-Bow in the City of London. Recent highlights have included Vaughan Williams' A Sea Symphony at Smith Square Hall, performances of Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra and Miraculous Mandarin, Beethoven's 6th Symphony directed from the violin by Britten Sinfonia's Alexandra Caldon, and Stravinsky's Firebird and Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker performed with newly devised narration.

The Orchestra

Violin I

Patrick Bevan
Ellen Dunn
Nicholas Bacon
Tory Sawyer
Wendi Wang
Ermos Chrysochos
Freya Stewart
James Lynch
Hattie Hunter
Charlotte Strivens
Alex Dawkins
Franziska Deschner

Violin II

Harri Caddick
Chloe Rush
Camilla Nelson
Sergei Batishchev
Anahita Falaki
Sophia Goode
Kathy Yoon
Tim Seeger
Joscelyn Hilder
Sacha Lee
Yosi Philip-McKenzie
Toby Scadding

Viola

Sarah McCabe
Jay Boyd
Ed Daley
John Hinchliffe
Annabel Bainbridge
Alice Appleton
Rosa Pike
Rachel Maxey

'Cello

Sarah Hughes
Morgan Jones
Eloise Ramchandani
Charlotte Comon
Natalie Bevan
Lewis Hammond
Rosi Callery

Double Bass

James Kiln
Hettie Burn
Arthur Stouff*
Alexander Joe*
Valerian Salari*

Flute

Andy Martin
Imogen Morrell
Jenny Whitby

Piccolo

Imogen Morrell
Jenny Whitby

Oboe

Charlotte Bagby-Evans
Sarah Gale

Clarinet

Alexander Card
Steph Bissell-Street
Owen Saldanha

Bass Clarinet

Steph Bissell-Street

E♭ Clarinet

Owen Saldanha

Bassoon

Verity Burcombe*
James Branchflower

Contra Bassoon

Grace Meadows

Horn

Myrddin Rees Davies
Izzy Wick
Jack Bradley Buxton*
Ben Horton
Joe Johnson

Trumpet

Victor Rosi
Alice Godfrey
Jude Holloway

Trombone

Gordon MacLochlan
Archie Lee

Bass Trombone

Jack Kelly

Tuba

Tom Steer

Harp

Aisha Palmer*

Piano/Celeste

Jonathan McNaught

Percussion

Sana Abu-Jabir*
Shesh Abu-Jabir*
Sami Alsindi
Charlie Furber
Will Lewis-Smith

* Denotes guest

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Support us by becoming a **Friend** or **Patron** of the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow today.

As a self-funded organisation, the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow covers the majority of its costs through ticket sales, player subs and donations. With operating overheads continuing to rise, we now rely more than ever on the support of generous individuals who believe in what we do. Your support will help the orchestra to continue making outstanding music in some of London's most iconic venues, and allow ambitious future projects to be realised.

Friends and Patrons of the orchestra receive exclusive benefits at our concerts as well as acknowledgement of their generosity and support for the orchestra.

Friend membership: £60 per year

- 25% off **two** tickets at each concert
- One free drink per purchased discounted Friend ticket at each concert*
- Entry into a prize draw for each concert, with the chance to win a pair of free tickets
- Reserved seating upon request
- Acknowledgement as a Friend in concert programmes

Premium Friend membership: £100 per year (recommended for couples or households)

- 25% off **four** tickets at each concert
- One free drink per purchased discounted Friend ticket at each concert*
- Entry into a prize draw for each concert, with the chance to win a pair of free tickets
- Reserved seating upon request
- Acknowledgement as a Premium Friend in concert programmes

Patron membership: Over £100 per year (amount of the donors choosing)

For extremely kind support above and beyond the Premium Friend membership (over £100), Patrons will receive all of the benefits of a Premium Friend membership, plus special acknowledgement in our programmes and on our website as one of our most generous supporters.

If you're interested in becoming a friend, please visit our website

www.academyofstmarylebow.com or email friends@academyofstmarylebow.com.

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Upcoming Concerts

28th November 2026

St John's Waterloo SE1 8TY

Conductor: Alex Fryer

Violin: Makoto Nakata

Bruch – Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26

Tchaikovsky – Swan Lake (reimagined) *with live narration*

6th February 2027

Smith Square Hall SW1P 3HA

Conductor: Alex Fryer

Choir: I Dodici

Holst – The Planets Op. 32

Debussy – Nocturnes