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17 November 2021  
7.30pm  
Barbican Hall

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**Guildhall Symphony  
Orchestra**

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Baldur Brönnimann  
*Conductor*

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Gabriele Strata  
*Piano*

**GUILD  
HALL  
SCHOOL**

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**Shostakovich**  
Symphony No 9

**Rachmaninov**  
Rhapsody on a  
Theme of Paganini

Interval

**Mussorgsky**  
**(orch. Ravel)**  
Pictures at an  
Exhibition

**Guildhall Symphony Orchestra**  
**Baldur Brönnimann** conductor  
**Gabriele Strata** piano

Wednesday 17 November 2021  
7.30pm, Barbican Hall

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# Welcome



Our concert this evening unites three of Russia's great composers. It explores the art of musical translation and celebrates the orchestra as a vehicle for powerful artistic statements, both large and small. And it warns how that expression is all too easily silenced by censorship.

We open with Dmitri Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony. Understated, playful, sardonic, at times melancholic, this was not the grand Ninth that Soviet officialdom had expected to mark victory in World War II – the state's Central Committee banned the piece less than three years after its premiere. Such censorship was a fate that Sergei Rachmaninov's music had already faced in the Soviet Union for more than a decade. By the time he wrote the Rhapsody that we hear in this concert, he was living as an exile – acclaimed as a pianist in the concert halls of the West, proscribed at home. The Rhapsody is a showpiece for piano and orchestra that ingeniously transforms a theme written over a century earlier by a fellow virtuoso, the great Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini. Tonight we are excited to introduce Artist Diploma pianist Gabriele Strata as soloist in this perennial favourite.

After the interval the full resources of the symphony orchestra are unleashed in another work of musical transformation. In Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, we wander through an art gallery reimagined in sound. This time the original music was for solo piano but we hear it reworked by Maurice Ravel into a tour de force of orchestral writing. Listen out for some surprising additions to the conventional orchestra, guided tonight by conductor Baldur Brönnimann. We are delighted to welcome him to the Guildhall Symphony Orchestra for the first time.

I wish you a wonderful evening,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Armin Zanner". The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end of the name.

Armin Zanner  
*Interim Director of Music*

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# Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75)

## Symphony No 9 in E flat major (1945)



1. *Allegro*
2. *Moderato* –
3. *Presto* –
4. *Largo* –
5. *Allegretto* – *Allegro*

The curse of the ninth symphony loomed large over composers from the 19th century onwards, arising from the unhappy fact that a number of composers – Schubert, Beethoven, Dvorák and Bruckner among them – had failed to complete a tenth. But Shostakovich was conscious of a different force hovering over his Ninth Symphony. In 1943, even before the premiere of his previous symphony, the Eighth, he had already announced that the Ninth would be a celebration of the Red Army’s impending victory over German forces and the liberation of the Russian people as the Second World War was coming to an end. The following year he declared he wanted the Ninth to feature a choir and soloists – but he was at pains to avoid what he called ‘immodest analogies’ with Beethoven’s Ninth, whose audacious ‘Ode to Joy’ choral finale has already tackled a grand theme – that of universal brotherhood and of humankind transcending its earthbound constraints.

Shostakovich worked on the Ninth between January and August 1945. Its premiere in November that year, under Yevgeny Mravinsky (who had conducted the premieres of Shostakovich’s Fifth, Sixth and Eighth symphonies) confused listeners and critics alike. Instead of a grand statement of Soviet triumph and a tribute to Russia’s great leader Joseph Stalin, what they heard was a surprisingly slight work – under 30 minutes in length (the Seventh and Eighth had each run to over an hour). The relatively modest, transparent scoring recalled the Classical clarity of Mozart and Haydn, and the tone was largely witty, even irreverent.

The musicologist Izrail Nestyev asked: ‘Is it the right time for a great composer to go on vacation, to take a break from contemporary problems?’ and the *New York World-Telegram* admonished Shostakovich, who ‘should not have expressed his feelings about the death of Nazism in such a childish manner’.

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For sure, there's a strong streak of childishness in the first movement, which opens with a kooky theme in the strings. Even more nose-thumbing is the whistling piccolo theme preceded by a blustery trombone and accompanied by a military snare drum. If this is any kind of commentary on the war, then the association is more with circus-arena pratfalls than with theatre-of-conflict bravery.

By contrast the sinuous main melody of the second movement is enigmatic and reflective. When the strings enter it's with a kind of faux-alarmist episode (perhaps one of the many clichés with which, as one French critic claimed, the symphony was 'shamelessly bestrewn'). There is a touch of melancholy here but also the hope of a peaceful new beginning.

The last three movements are joined together, starting with a colourful brisk scherzo, straightforwardly sparkling apart from a sardonic, Spanish-flavoured trumpet tune accompanied by galloping strings. The strings darken the tone ahead of the fourth-movement Largo. This opens with an imperious brass fanfare, answered by a high bassoon lament. Fanfare and lament alternate again, before the bassoon nonchalantly sheds its costume and walks jauntily into the final movement. With its tick-tocking accompaniment the mood here is mostly jovial, but tension later mounts and a sudden acceleration brings an air of hysteria. This erupts into a grand march, but one that is as empty as it is emphatic, and the symphony ends with a frivolous race to the end in a manner recalling Rossini – perhaps not insignificantly, a grand master of the comic opera.

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# Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

## Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43 (1934)



It's a great loss – but no surprise, given the circumstances – that Rachmaninov wrote very little music after leaving his native Russia following the Revolutions of 1917. In terms of the piano works, he had already composed both sets of *Preludes*, the two piano sonatas, the two groups of *Études-Tableaux* and three of the four piano concertos, all during the previous seven years.

Having abandoned his country estate back home and low on cash, once in New York his best option to earn a steady income was to go on the road as a pianist. He undertook several years of gruelling tours – at the height of which, in the 1922–23 season, he gave over 70 concerts in less than five months.

In 1931, the year he had co-signed a letter to the *New York Times* criticising the atrocities of the Communist regime in Moscow (and in return having a ban slapped on his works), he wrote the first piano work since leaving Russia, the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli*, Op 42. Three years later came his last piano work, another set of variations, this time taking as its theme the last of Paganini's 24 Caprices for solo violin.

Rachmaninov wrote his variations in less than seven weeks during the summer of 1934 at his villa, Senar, on the shores of Lake Lucerne. He gave the first performance in Baltimore on 7 November with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski.

Like the Paganini piece that inspired it, and reflecting the composer's own famously brilliant keyboard prowess, the variations present a compendium of technical challenges for the soloist.

After the short introduction, the first thing we hear, unconventionally, is not the theme itself, but the first variation, simply outlining the skeleton of the theme. Then comes the theme proper, following which Variations 2 to 5 continue at a quick pace, while Variation 6 offers a change in mood ahead of Variation 7, which first introduces the morose *Dies irae* motif (from the medieval plainchant for the dead), which Rachmaninov was fond of quoting. Variations 8 to 10 concentrate on chordal writing for the piano rather than passagework, with No 10 also bringing a reprise of the *Dies irae*.

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The pace slows with the more dreamlike Variations 11 and 12. Variation 15 is a busy scampering display for the pianist, for the first part with no accompaniment. Variation 18 is the beloved, unfailingly beautiful emblem of Romantic piano music ingeniously formed simply by turning the Paganini theme on its head.

The last variations, 19 to 24, present a sequence of challenges for the pianist, the most brutal of which Rachmaninov leaves until last: the double-handed lightning-quick crab-like movements of Variation 24 apparently unsettled the composer himself. According to his friend, the pianist Benno Moiseiwitsch, Rachmaninov would steady his nerves before playing the *Variations* by drinking a crème de menthe liqueur.

*I remember first coming across Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini at a concert I attended in my early teens. What struck me the most about the performance was noticing how much fun the pianist was having on stage.*

*This is what I am aiming for and what the music calls for: it is a witty, satirical, almost parody-like take on the famous Paganini Caprice which, under Rachmaninov's pen, morphs into every possible shape, character and colour. It is the remarkable work of a composer whose life is clearly influenced by all the novelties of the 'New World', merging jazz and improvisational elements with the staple Russian lyricism so typical of his earlier works.*

*It has been an absolute joy to prepare this concerto and I am so looking forward to sharing the Barbican stage with my peers. A special thank you to my teacher Ronan O'Hora for the constant inspiration and support he has given me.*

*Gabriele Strata*



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# Modest Mussorgsky (1839–81), orch. Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) Pictures at an Exhibition (1874, orch. 1922)



1. *Gnomus [Gnome]*

*Promenade*

2. *Il vecchio castello [The Old Castle]*

*Promenade*

3. *Tuileries (Dispute d'enfants après jeux) [Quarrelling children at play]*

4. *Bydło [The Ox-Cart]*

*Promenade –*

5. *Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks*

6. *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuÿle*

7. *Limoges: Le marche (La grande nouvelle) [The Marketplace (Hot gossip)] –*

8. *Catacombae (Sepulcrum romanum) – Cum mortuis in lingua mortua [Catacombs (Roman Tomb) – With the Dead in the Language of the Dead]*

9. *The Hut on Hens' Legs (Baba Yaga) –*

10. *The Great Gate of Kiev*

Though now better known in this colourful 1922 orchestral arrangement by Ravel, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* was originally conceived almost 50 years earlier as a piano suite, ambitious not only in its technical difficulty but also its novel concept. It was written after he visited a memorial exhibition in St Petersburg in February 1874 dedicated to his friend the artist and architect Viktor Hartmann, who had died the previous year.

Of the 400 items on display, Mussorgsky selected six, and added four others, curating his own gallery of 10 tableaux, occasionally linked by a Promenade during which we walk to the next image – though Ravel removed one of these, meaning that in this version we move directly between 'Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuÿle' and 'Limoges'.

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We know from Ravel's friend, the critic M. D. Calvocoressi, that Mussorgsky was his favourite Russian composer, along with Borodin and Balakirev. He also held Rimsky-Korsakov and Glinka in high esteem, but apparently didn't care much for Tchaikovsky. In applying his typically detailed orchestral colourings and effects, Ravel went far beyond a simple rehanging of Mussorgsky's pictures, instead bathing them all in a new light.

After the scene-setting first Promenade with its steady tread, comes Hartmann's sketch of a nutcracker shaped as a Gnome's head. Ravel's orchestral touches include the twang of muted horns and trumpet, mysterious swooping upper strings and, just before the end, a snarling ratchet.

The diaphanous second Promenade is a calming upbeat to The Old Castle. Standing before it is a troubadour, voiced by the unusual timbre of the alto saxophone, sounding both ancient and modern.

A bold, march-like version of the Promenade leads us to Tuileries, the Parisian garden where children are at play.

According to the descriptions by the critic Vladimir Stasov that appeared in the first printed edition of Mussorgsky's piano score, Bydło describes 'a Polish cart on enormous wheels, drawn by oxen'. Unlike in Mussorgsky's original, Ravel contrived for the cart to come gradually into view. Trudgery and oppression are bedded in by tuba, bass drum and an extended snare drum roll.

The ponderous mood of the next Promenade is quickly broken by the pecking and clucking that accompanies the Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks, referring to a drawing Hartmann made for the ballet *Trilby* at the Bolshoi Theatre, featuring choreography by Marius Petipa.

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle relates to sketches of two Polish Jews, one rich, one poor. The stout and steaky Goldenberg comes first, after whom the emaciated Schmuyle forms a sharp contrast; the tricky fast-repeated notes of the piano original are here transferred to a muted trumpet.

The balletic, bustling Marketplace at Limoges is the next image, into which Ravel injects scintillating instrumental colour.

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This leads directly into the terrifying brass chords of Catacombs, based on Hartmann's self-portrait of his visit to Paris's skull-lined subterranean burial site. Cum mortuis combines the Promenade theme with muted tremolo half-lights in violins and violas.

The Hut on Hens' Legs is, like Limoges, a vivid showpiece, this one recalling Baba-Yaga the witch from Russian folklore who lives in a hut supported by hens' legs. Hartmann's drawing was of a decorative clock in the shape of a hut, but Mussorgsky took a more malevolent tone, which Ravel enhanced with all the deftness and fantasy of Paul Dukas in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

Finally comes The Great Gate of Kiev, the movement Ravel tackled first as he found it the least interesting to orchestrate. In 1866 Hartmann designed a city gate for a competition to celebrate Tsar Alexander II's survival following an assassination attempt. Mussorgsky's finale is more dramatic than Hartmann's sketch, and Ravel scales up this aspect further, drawing on tubular bell (Hartmann's design incorporated a belltower), cymbals and tam-tam to forge a monumental conclusion.

*Programme notes by Edward Bhesania © 2021*

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# Baldur Brönnimann

## conductor



Baldur Brönnimann is a conductor of great flexibility with a broad-minded approach to programme-building and music-making. He is deeply committed to making classical music relevant in the 21st century, commissioning new works and curating festivals and series, including the Desclasificados project in Madrid, which gives opportunities to young up-and-coming artists. He has a strong commitment to outreach and educational work, working with youth orchestras such as the Junge Norddeutsche Philharmonie.

Baldur has conducted at festivals such as Wien Modern, Darmstadt, Mostly Mozart at Lincoln Center and the BBC Proms and has worked with the Seoul Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, WDR Symphony, Barcelona Symphony, Bergen Philharmonic, Vienna Radio Symphony, Aurora and Munich Chamber orchestras amongst others. In the opera house, he conducted Ligeti *Le Grand Macabre* at English National Opera, Komische Oper Berlin and Teatro Colón, John Adams *Death of Klinghoffer* at English National Opera, Kaija Saariaho *L'amour de loin* at the Bergen Festival and Norwegian Opera, and Romitelli *Index of Metals* with Barbara Hannigan at the Theater an der Wien.

He is Principal Conductor of the Basel Sinfonietta with whom he continues to conduct programmes, combining contemporary and unknown works with standard repertoire in typically unexpected ways, on a constant quest to challenge classical conventions and to explore new avenues for orchestral performance. In 2020 he concluded his hugely successful six-year tenure as Principal Conductor of the Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, where he returns each season. He was previously Artistic Director of Norway's leading contemporary music ensemble BIT20, and Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra of Colombia in Bogotá.

Born in Switzerland, Baldur trained at the City of Basel Music Academy and at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he was subsequently appointed Visiting Tutor in Conducting. He now lives in Madrid.

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# Gabriele Strata

piano



Gabriele Strata has established himself as one of the leading Italian pianists of his generation. In 2018 he won first prize at the XXXV Premio Venezia, the most prestigious Italian piano competition, where he was awarded the Plaque of the President of the Italian Republic and the Medal of the Italian Senate. The Italian government previously recognised his artistic achievements in 2016 when he was awarded the Medal of the Italian Parliament.

Gabriele regularly performs in Italy and across Europe. His upcoming performances include debut concerto appearances in the Berlin Philharmonie with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen (China) with the Young Musician European Orchestra, and in Venice with the Orchestra del Teatro la Fenice, as well as a debut recital at Wigmore Hall in July 2022. He has given recitals in prominent concert halls including Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Philharmonic Hall in Bratislava and Fazioli Concert Hall in Sacile, as well as venues in Brussels, Paris, Florence, Rotterdam, Portland (OR), New Haven (CT), Verona, Bologna, Treviso, Padova.

An avid chamber musician, he has played at Wigmore Hall and Milton Court Concert Hall, and has premiered chamber music works by Academy Award nominee Thomas Newman and Pulitzer Prize finalist Kate Soper. His recitals are regularly broadcast on Italian national Radio (Rai 3) and on television (Sky Classical).

Gabriele received his Master of Music (M.M) degree from Yale University in 2019 aged 19, and a Master of Musical Arts (M.M.A) degree at Yale University under the guidance of Professor Boris Berman. He is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma degree at Guildhall School, studying with Ronan O'Hora, as well as an Artist Diploma at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome.

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# Guildhall Symphony Orchestra

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## Shostakovich & Rachmaninov

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Paula Gorbanova\*  
Jeff Wu  
Anna Mollà Aliaga  
Imogen Brewer  
Maris Pilgrim  
Fiona Cheung  
Madeleine Dawson  
Abbie Davis  
Mariana Cabrel Monteiro  
Anna Holmes  
Andrei Mamara  
Lara Caister  
Amy Le-Mar  
Pedro Marques Rodrigues  
Mario Francés Gorria

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### Violin II

Violetta Suvini\*  
Leonardo Barbosa  
Jacqueline Monteiro  
Camille Said  
Amelia Harding  
Wei Ling Thong  
Joana Correia Rodrigues  
Emma McNeely  
Reonel Rafols  
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Ross Hume  
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### Viola

Mira Williams\*  
Elena Sanchez  
Iina Marja-Aho  
Sally Belcher  
James Flannery  
Eleanor Walton  
Hannah Roberts  
Jennifer McEwan  
Josh Law  
Hui Pang Lee  
Sirma Baramova  
Hugo Haag  
Dominic Stokes

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### Cello

Gabriel Francis-Dehqani\*  
Yishang Sheng  
Harry Everitt  
Anna Ryland-Jones  
James McBeth  
Charlie Walker  
Aline Christ  
Natalie Alfille-Cook  
Joe Barker

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### Double bass

Yat Hei Lee\*  
Fabián Galeana  
Georgia Lloyd  
Evangelos Saklaras  
Max Salisbury  
Antonio Díaz Fernández  
Catharina Feyen  
Suliac Maheu

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### Flute

Imogen Davey\*  
Rebecca Rouch

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### Piccolo

Katie Bartels

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### Oboe

Cat Lockhart\*  
Charis Lai

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### Cor anglais

Sam Willmore

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Marian Bozhidarov\*  
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### Bassoon

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Ka Hei Ma\*  
Niamh Rogers  
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### Bass Trombone

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### Tuba

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Longfei Wang\*  
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### Harp

Emily Sullivan

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**Mussorgsky**

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**Violin I**

Paula Gorbanova\*  
Jeff Wu  
Jacqueline Monteiro  
Camille Said  
Amelia Harding  
Wei Ling Thong  
Joana Correia Rodrigues  
Emma McNeely  
Reonel Rafols  
Vanessa White  
Ross Hume  
Paula Guerra  
Ivelina Ivanova  
Yeva Volkova  
Tiago Costa  
Nina Lim

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Josh Law  
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Sirma Baramova  
Hugo Haag  
Dominic Stokes

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Georgia Lloyd  
Evangelos Saklaras  
Antonio Díaz Fernández  
Max Salisbury  
Catharina Feyen  
Suliac Maheu

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**Piccolo**

Anna Ryan

**Oboe**

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**Horn**

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Louis Grao  
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Engin Eskici  
Cláudia Costa Gonçalves  
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**Amanda Truelove** cello  
**Tom Goodman** double bass  
**Julian Gil Rodriguez** tutti strings  
**Sharon Williams** flute  
**Maxwell Spiers** oboe  
**Chi-Yu Mo** clarinet  
**Joost Bosdijk** bassoon; wind, brass & percussion  
**Jonathan Lipton** horn  
**Gerry Ruddock** trumpet  
**Ben Thompson** trombone & tuba; brass & percussion  
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**Timothy Jones** wind, brass & percussion

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The Thompson Educational Trust  
Mr Hugh Vanstone  
Ms Anna Weeks  
The Worshipful Company of Barbers  
The Worshipful Company of Chartered  
Surveyors  
The Worshipful Company of Cordwainers  
The Worshipful Company of Dyers  
The Worshipful Company of Gold and Silver  
Wyre Drawers  
The Worshipful Company of Horners  
The Worshipful Company of Musicians

The Worshipful Company of Tallow  
Chandlers

The Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers  
The Worshipful Company of Weavers

For further information about supporting  
Guildhall School and its students,  
please contact the Development Office  
on 020 7382 7179 or email  
development@gsm.d.ac.uk

We have done our utmost to ensure the  
information listed here is accurate. If there  
is anything you would like us to amend  
please get in touch.

*The Guildball School Trust is a Registered  
Charity, No. 1082472*

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## Forthcoming events

**Thursday 25 – Tuesday 30 November**  
**Milton Court Studio Theatre**

### Opera Scenes

**Martin Lloyd-Evans** director  
**Elizabeth Rowe** music director

Outstanding singers and répétiteurs from the first year of the Guildhall School Opera Course perform classical and contemporary operatic excerpts with piano accompaniment.

*Tickets:* £10 (£5 concessions)

Please visit [gsmd.ac.uk/events](http://gsmd.ac.uk/events) to find out more and book tickets.

**Saturday 4 December, 5.30pm**  
**Milton Court Concert Hall**

### Junior Guildhall Symphony Orchestra

**Julian Clayton** conductor

The outstanding young musicians of Junior Guildhall Symphony Orchestra and String Ensemble return to Milton Court Concert Hall for a performance under the baton of Julian Clayton.

*Tickets:* £10 (£5 concessions)

Please visit [gsmd.ac.uk/events](http://gsmd.ac.uk/events) to find out more and book tickets.

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**Join the  
Guildhall Patrons**  
Empower our students  
to light up stages  
and concert halls  
around the world

# PATRONS

Your support will safeguard the School's specialist training of international musicians, actors and production artists and provide expert masterclasses, strands of specialist teaching and the equipment essential to maintaining Guildhall School as a world-leading conservatoire.

As a Patron you will be richly rewarded with performances across the breadth of the School's artistic disciplines. We invite you to witness artists in training and enjoy a fulfilling rapport with Guildhall staff, students and fellow supporters.

**For more information about becoming a Patron, please contact:  
Daniella Rodriguez, Development Officer,  
[daniella.rodriguez@gsm.d.ac.uk](mailto:daniella.rodriguez@gsm.d.ac.uk)**