



## Creative Union

**Iceland Symphony Orchestra marks its first appearance in the UK under new Chief Conductor Eva Ollikainen with seven-concert tour (20-28 April 2023)**

**Tour programmes include Anna Thorvaldsdottir's sublime *METACOSMOS*, piano concertos by Beethoven and Rachmaninov with Sir Stephen Hough as soloist, and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony**

'It's an orchestra with pedigree and class, and on this London showing fielding a notably strong string section, silky warmth and finesse at a premium,'

*Classical Source*, review of Cadogan Hall concert, February 2020



Creativity comes naturally to the people of Iceland. The island nation's cultural achievements continue to flourish and reach far beyond its shores. British audiences have the chance to hear one of its finest musical assets when the Iceland Symphony Orchestra returns to the UK with Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Eva Ollikainen and pianist Sir Stephen Hough. Their seven-concert tour opens at Cadogan Hall in London on Thursday 20 April 2023 and unfolds with performances at Birmingham Symphony Hall (21 April), Usher Hall in Edinburgh (23 April), Bridgewater Hall in Manchester (25 April), Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall (26 April), St David's Hall Cardiff (27 April) and The Anvil, Basingstoke (28 April).

The Iceland Symphony Orchestra will begin each concert with *METACOSMOS* by its Composer-in-Residence, Anna Thorvaldsdottir. The fourteen-minute work, an exquisite study in instrumental timbres and textures, explores the natural balance between beauty and chaos and the emergence of the former from the latter. Sir Stephen Hough is set to perform Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No.2 or Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.3, while the second half of each programme is devoted to Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.5.

Eva Ollikainen began her tenure as Chief Conductor at the start of the 2020-21 season, fifteen years after making her debut with the ISO. Despite pandemic safety restrictions, she was able to work with the orchestra for substantial periods and develop her relationship with its players. "It's a great pleasure to experience this wonderful country," she comments. "Covid meant that, once I'd been through quarantine, I could spend four or five weeks at a time with the orchestra and really get to know the players and for them to get to know me. This was a beautiful time, rehearsing and performing in our wonderful home at Harpa, one of the world's great concert halls. Now we have the chance to share what we've been doing together with audiences in the UK. Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov speak to universal emotions and feelings, just as Anna Thorvaldsdottir does in her music."

Thorvaldsdottir's *METACOSMOS* is, as the composer notes, rooted as much in the human experience as it is in the creative chaos of the universe. The piece was inspired by the notion of falling into a black hole in space, a metaphor for the unknown. 'As with my music generally, the inspiration behind *METACOSMOS* is not something I am trying to describe through the piece – to me, the qualities of the music are first and foremost musical,' observes Anna Thorvaldsdottir. *METACOSMOS* was written for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and first performed by them with Esa-Pekka Salonen in April 2018; its UK premiere was given in July 2019 at the BBC Proms by the joint orchestra of the Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School conducted by Edward Gardner. Thorvaldsdottir will travel with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra on its UK tour and take part in pre-concert talks at some of the venues.

"Anna is incredible," comments Eva Ollikainen. "Listening to her music feels like a purification process for the mind and soul. It is always a rich mental and spiritual journey. We're so privileged to have her as our Composer-in-Residence as she's in such huge demand around the world. I'm thrilled we're performing *METACOSMOS* on tour. The Iceland Symphony Orchestra's players are outstanding performers of contemporary compositions and

have a jaw-dropping mutual understanding of the spirit of the music of our time. It's always a joy to perform works by living composers with them."

Sir Stephen Hough is the Iceland Symphony Orchestra's Artist-in-Association throughout the 2022-23 season. He and Ollikainen worked together for the first time at Harpa in early January and will perform Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto in Reykjavík in February ahead of their UK outing. "Stephen is such an incredible musician and human being," notes the conductor. "I look forward to our collaboration and working with him on tour."

Lára Sóley Jóhannsdóttir, Managing Director of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, praises Eva Ollikainen and emphasizes the importance of what she has already achieved in Reykjavík. "Eva has done a fantastic job with the orchestra," she observes. "Although the pandemic has been difficult, it gave us the chance to have her here for longer than usual. It will be a great joy for us to return to the UK with our Chief Conductor. Our last visit, which was part of the orchestra's seventieth anniversary celebrations in 2020, was a great success. It's so important for the Iceland Symphony Orchestra to travel abroad, experience different halls and build relationships with our audiences overseas. It feels so wonderful to come back to the UK for our first tour since the pandemic, especially as we went into lockdown almost immediately after we came home from our last visit three years ago."

In many ways the development of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra reflects its homeland's international outlook and wholehearted commitment to culture. Almost a third of its players are of foreign origin, with thirteen nationalities currently represented in the orchestra's ranks. "It's such a vibrant and exciting community of musicians," says Jóhannsdóttir. "Many of our overseas players have lived here for thirty or forty years and are true locals! It has been very important for us to have this international membership as part of Iceland's national orchestra. And of course, it's special for us to bring music by a great Icelandic composer to our audiences in the UK."

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## NOTES FOR EDITORS

### **Iceland Symphony Orchestra**

Since its inaugural concert in 1950, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra has expanded from a part-time ensemble of forty players to an internationally renowned orchestra of ninety full-time musicians. As Iceland's national orchestra, resident at Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavík, it gives around one hundred concerts each season, its repertoire ranging from traditional classical works to contemporary and film music. It has worked with such renowned musicians as Daniel Barenboim, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, Jonas Kaufmann, Isabelle Faust, Evelyn Glennie, Barbara Hannigan, and Víkingur Ólafsson. Coinciding with the Orchestra's 70th anniversary concert in 2020, Eva Ollikainen assumed the position of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director. Vladimir Ashkenazy is Conductor Laureate and has conducted the Orchestra regularly since the early 1970s. Acclaimed Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir is Composer-in-Residence and Daníel Bjarnason is Artist in Association.

The Iceland Symphony Orchestra has appeared widely throughout Europe, performing at the BBC Proms in Royal Albert Hall, Usher Hall in Edinburgh, and Wiener Musikverein, among other venues. In 2018, under the baton of Vladimir Ashkenazy, the Orchestra took a highly successful three-week tour of Japan. It has also appeared twice in New York's Carnegie Hall. The Iceland Symphony Orchestra records regularly for leading music labels and has received many international awards, as well as two Grammy nominations for Best Orchestral Performance.

**Eva Ollikainen** conductor | **Sir Stephen Hough** piano | **Iceland Symphony Orchestra**

**PROGRAMME A**

**Anna Thorvaldsdottir** *METACOSMOS*

**Rachmaninov** Piano Concerto No.2

**Tchaikovsky** Symphony No.5

**PROGRAMME B**

**Anna Thorvaldsdottir** *METACOSMOS*

**Beethoven** Piano Concerto No.3

**Tchaikovsky** Symphony No.5

**Thursday 20 April 2023 7.30pm Cadogan Hall, London**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME A**

**Friday 21 April 2023 7.30pm Symphony Hall, Birmingham**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME B**

**Sunday 23 April 2023 3pm Usher Hall, Edinburgh**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME A**

**Tuesday 25 April 2023 7.30pm Bridgewater Hall, Manchester**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME A**

**Wednesday 26 April 2023 7.30pm Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME B**

**Thursday 27 April 2023 7.30pm St David's Hall, Cardiff**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME B**

**Friday 28 April 2023 7.45pm The Anvil, Basingstoke**

[Event link](#)

**PROGRAMME A**