



Cultural Relations

Symphony Orchestra of India returns to the UK for eight-concert tour in London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Coventry, Bradford, Croydon and Cambridge (29 November – 8 December 2023), performing European premiere of Zakir Hussain's Triple Concerto and mix of Western classical works

Programmes to be conducted by Alpesh Chauhan and Richard Farnes, with soloists Zakir Hussain, Niladri Kumar and Rakesh Chaurasia, Pavel Kolesnikov and Marat Bisengaliev

The Symphony Orchestra of India's inaugural tour of Britain in February 2019 enchanted audiences and drew critical acclaim. The *Arts Desk* praised the 'excitement, sense of discovery and real zest for the music' demonstrated by its players, while the *Guardian* commended their 'hugely competent' musicianship. The multinational ensemble, the sub-continent's first and only fully professional orchestra, returns to the UK later this year for an eight-concert tour (29 November – 8 December 2023). Its players will travel from their home base at Mumbai's National Centre for the Performing Arts to present three programmes. The tour stands as a significant event in the growing calendar of cultural connections between Britain and India. Its repertoire will include the European premiere of Zakir Hussain's Triple Concerto for tabla, sitar, bansuri and orchestra, together with works by Brahms, Khachaturian, Rossini, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Wagner and John Williams.

The SOI's musicians will be joined by guest conductors Alpesh Chauhan and Richard Farnes, tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain, sitarist Niladri Kumar and bansuri player Rakesh Chaurasia, pianist Pavel Kolesnikov and the orchestra's co-founder and Music Director, Marat Bisengaliev, who takes the solo part in Khachaturian's Violin Concerto. Their tour opens at Warwick Arts Centre on Wednesday 29 November with the 'Imperial March' from John Williams' *Star Wars* soundtrack under Richard Farnes. He will also conduct the orchestra in Brahms' Piano Concerto No.2, with Pavel Kolesnikov as soloist, and the *Parsifal Suite*, skilfully constructed by Andrew Gourlay from the orchestral material of Wagner's opera.

Alpesh Chauhan, Music Director of Birmingham Opera Company, will conduct the European premiere of Zakir Hussain's Triple Concerto at London's Cadogan Hall on Thursday 30 November. The new work, commissioned by the SOI, displays its composer's spellbinding virtuosity together with that of his colleagues, sitarist Niladri Kumar and Rakesh Chaurasia, master of the bansuri (or Indian bamboo flute). Hussain's score arrives in Britain fresh from its world premiere in Mumbai on 23 September. It will be framed by Richard Strauss' Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier* and Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka*. Chauhan's programme can be heard again at Symphony Hall Birmingham on Friday 1 December and Edinburgh's Usher Hall on Sunday 3 December.

Farnes and the orchestra are set to repeat the Williams and Wagner works in Cambridge on Thursday 7 December and at London's Cadogan Hall on Friday 8 December, with Kolesnikov joining them on both occasions as soloist in Brahms' Piano Concerto No.2. Richard Farnes also conducts the tour's third programme at St George's Hall, Bradford on Saturday 2 December and presides over its repeat at Fairfield Halls, Croydon on Tuesday 5 December. The concert opens with 'Imperial March' from John Williams' *Star Wars* and includes Khachaturian's Violin Concerto, an overtly romantic work written for and dedicated to David Oistrakh, who in turn taught Marat Bisengaliev's teacher Valery Klimov. The programme concludes with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.6.

The Symphony Orchestra of India, resident at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai since its foundation in 2006, has made a significant contribution to the growth of India's prestige and standing on the global stage. It comprises a core group of musicians, resident in Mumbai year-round, who also perform as the SOI Chamber Orchestra, and guest members recruited from a pool of outstanding international players.

The education and training of Indian orchestral musicians ranks high on the SOI's list of priorities. The SOI Music Academy, established in 2012, recruits talented Indian children from the age of six or seven and provides them with a holistic music education. Its programme, delivered by SOI players under Marat Bisengaliev's supervision, saw the first cohort of students complete their full 11-year course in April. One of its graduates will

begin further training at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester this September, while alumnae of the SOI Music Academy's seven-year foundation course have already progressed to study at prestigious conservatoires and universities in Europe and the United States. Their skills have been strengthened by the experience of playing side by side with members of the Symphony Orchestra of India and the SOI Chamber Orchestra. It appears likely that they and their peers will greatly increase the size and quality of the next generation of Indian professional orchestral players.

"It is not easy to assemble an international orchestra in a somewhat remote venue for classical music," comments Khushroo N. Suntook, Chairman of the NCPA and co-founder of the SOI. "The Music Director, Marat Bisengaliev, and the Orchestra Manager, Onay Zhumabayeva, have carried out this admirable job over the last 15 years, not only establishing a core of permanent musicians but also augmenting the orchestra with both international and Indian musicians carefully chosen from a vast list of contacts. The orchestra also seeks to engage young Indian musicians who show promise, who will join the ranks of the orchestra after an initial training period. Some of our students, who have now graduated from the SOI Music Academy, play in the orchestra, and many are pursuing music further at leading conservatories around the world, including in the UK. We expect a few of these to join the orchestra on this next tour. This is so important to the future of our orchestra and of Western classical music in India."

Suntook underlines the importance of international touring to the Symphony Orchestra of India's artistic development. "In addition to our regular performances at home," he observes, "overseas tours have shown that the SOI makes music at a high international standard. Our first UK tour, which included six concerts, was the biggest we had undertaken to date. It showed to us – our musicians and our audiences – that the SOI can stand its ground in company with leading orchestras in the world. That is precisely what we demonstrated throughout the UK tour, garnering critical and audience acclaim for it. This certainly gave a boost in morale to our musicians, particularly to our young Indian talent. The UK tour certainly helped in maturing their presentation, which was evident in the seasons that followed, both before and after the pandemic."

Xerxes Unvala, General Manager of the Symphony Orchestra of India and of Western Classical Music Programming at the National Performing Arts Centre in Mumbai, stresses the importance of Zakir Hussain's Triple Concerto to the balance of the orchestra's tour repertoire. "Our home programme tends to be quite broad, stemming from the fact that we're still the only full-time professional orchestra in India," he says. "On the other hand, we know that many members of our audience will have never heard the core orchestral repertoire. So we wanted our tour programmes to reflect that wide mix."

Hussain's tabla concerto *Peshkar*, the SOI's first ever commission, proved a resounding success during the orchestra's 2019 tour. "Zakir was the obvious choice for our second commission," notes Unvala. "I'm sure his new Triple Concerto will be a big hit with our British audiences. This will be the fourth of his compositions that the orchestra has programmed. Zakir is a member of the Governing Council of the NCPA and, as such, is a fine supporter of the orchestra. He is also one of the world's great musicians, a wonderfully imaginative composer and a tremendous ambassador for Indian culture. We look forward to working with him again when we return to the UK."

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TOUR DETAILS

PROGRAMME A

Alpesh Chauhan conductor | **Zakir Hussain** tabla | **Niladri Kumar** sitar | **Rakesh Chaurasia** bansuri |
Symphony Orchestra of India

Strauss *Rosenkavalier* Suite
Hussain Triple Concerto (European premiere)
Stravinsky *Petrushka* (1947)

PROGRAMME B

Richard Farnes conductor | **Pavel Kolesnikov** piano | **Symphony Orchestra of India**

John Williams 'Imperial March' from *Star Wars*
Brahms Piano Concerto No.2
Wagner Parsifal Suite (arr. Andrew Gourlay)

PROGRAMME C

Richard Farnes conductor | **Marat Bisengaliev** violin | **Symphony Orchestra of India**

John Williams 'Imperial March' from *Star Wars*
Khachaturian Violin Concerto
Tchaikovsky Symphony No.6

Wednesday 29 November 2023, 7.30pm

Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME B

Thursday 30 November 2023, 7.30pm

Cadogan Hall, London

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME A

Friday 1 December 2023, 7.30pm

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME A

Saturday 2 December 2023, 7.30pm

St George's Hall, Bradford

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME C

Sunday 3 December 2023, 7.30pm

Usher Hall, Edinburgh

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME A

Tuesday 5 December 2023, 7.30pm

Fairfield Halls, Croydon

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME C

Thursday 7 December 2023, 7.30pm

Corn Exchange, Cambridge

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME B

Friday 8 December 2023, 7.30pm

Cadogan Hall, London

[Event page](#)

PROGRAMME B