



Solihull Symphony Orchestra



Programme £1

Northern Lights
Shirley Methodist Church
15:30 Saturday 25 April 2026

Tommaso Nista



Italian conductor Tommaso Nista is known for his passion for storytelling across symphonic, operatic, and contemporary repertoire. He is Music Director of the Solihull Symphony Orchestra, Assistant Conductor and Librarian of the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Junior Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra and Associate MD of the Loughborough Orchestra. He is invited regularly by several orchestras around Birmingham. A proud advocate for innovative programming, education, and inclusivity, Tommaso is also Chief Conductor of the Birmingham Game Music ensemble, an orchestra dedicated to video game soundtracks, for which he often

works as an arranger. Under his direction, the ensemble has presented music from *Final Fantasy*, *The Last of Us*, and *The Legend of Zelda*, amongst others, bringing new audiences to orchestral music.

Tommaso recently graduated with Distinction in Orchestral Conducting from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. His mentors include Kazuki Yamada, Karen Ní Bhroin, Daniele Rosina, Michael Seal, Paul Murphy, and Paul Wingfield. During his studies, he assisted in opera productions including *Cendrillon* (Massenet), *Albert Herring* (Britten), *Hansel und Gretel* (Humperdinck), and *Fête Galante* (Smythe), and received both the Guy Wolfenden Prize for Young Conductors (2024) and the Michael Beech Conducting Award (2025).

Tommaso began his conducting journey in Italy, studying wind band and choir conducting. In 2020, he attended the Italian Opera Academy in Ravenna under Riccardo Muti, which deepened his commitment to the Italian operatic tradition. Now he is also active as an Italian language coach and team-building expert with several opera studios and companies across the UK.

Programme notes - Vivienne Brown and David Evans.
Cover - *After the Storm* (1905), Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (1863–1958), National Museum, Oslo

Programme

Larsson – Pastoral Suite 13'

Sibelius – En Saga 20'

INTERVAL

Grieg - Peer Gynt Suite No 1 15'

Nielsen - Symphony No 4 37'

Conductor

Tommaso Nista

Leader

Charlotte Beresford

Please make sure that all telephones, watch alarms and other electronic devices that make noises are switched OFF or to silent. You can make short video recordings and take photographs - but please do not use flash and be careful not to disturb people nearby. And we'd love it if you could share them and tag us on social media!

Lars-Erik Larsson (1908-1986)

Pastoral Suite, Op. 19



Lars-Erik Larsson was born near Malmö in Skåne, the southernmost part of Sweden, and studied in Stockholm before travelling to Vienna to work privately with Alban Berg. It was a formative experience, although there is little evidence of Berg's more challenging and atonal expressionism in Larsson's warmly melodic music. Sweden seems to have found its own way through the upheavals of twentieth-century music, although Swedish composers are less well known than their counterparts from the rest of

Scandinavia

By 1937 Larsson was working as a composer and conductor for the Swedish national radio service, and he developed a new kind of popular entertainment he called the 'lyrical suite,' a genre in which orchestral music and recited poetry were interleaved. He worked with the poet Hjalmar Gullberg on a sequence called *The Hours of the Day*, which premiered on Swedish Radio in October 1938. Larsson subsequently extracted three of its six movements and published them as the *Pastoral Suite*.

The opening Overture begins in slow, atmospheric string writing that has echoes of Sibelius before a brisk Allegro in C major takes over, with confident rhythms and some characteristically unusual harmonic sidesteps. The central Romance, written for strings alone, is the movement most often heard in isolation, and with good reason. It builds with unhurried assurance to an impassioned climax, and its teasing oscillation between E flat and E major gives it an unusual harmonic colour that lingers in the memory. The closing Scherzo brings back the full orchestra and opens with a flute solo of disarming simplicity. There is a flavour of the concerto grosso in the way Larsson sets the woodwind against the rest of the ensemble,

and the brass, absent throughout the Romance, make a brief but emphatic contribution before the whole orchestra comes together for four final, exhilarating chords.

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

En Saga, Op. 9

Jean Sibelius occupies an unusual place in musical history. He is not merely Finland's most celebrated composer but he became, almost involuntarily, the musical embodiment of the nation's struggle for independence, although as with many living in the south and west of the country, Swedish rather than Finnish was his mother tongue. Finland was under Russian rule, and the appetite for a distinctive Finnish cultural identity was fierce. Sibelius was happy to help, drawing on the *Kalevala*, the great Finnish national epic, as the source for a long sequence of orchestral works.

His personal life was moving quickly at the same time. He had fallen in love with Aino Järnefelt, whose family were sceptical about the prospects of a young violinist and composer. The triumph of his large-scale symphonic poem *Kullervo* in 1892 changed their minds, and the couple married that year, spending their honeymoon in Karelia, the heartland of the *Kalevala*. Sibelius was twenty-six,

newly famous, and by his own account rather full of himself. He informed Aino that, as an artist, he expected to be free to pursue his imaginative life undisturbed by the trivial business of raising children.

En Saga was completed that same year. His colleague and champion Robert Kajanus, conductor and



composer, had asked him for a single-movement orchestral work in a more accessible style than *Kullervo*, something that would not place excessive demands on the audience. *En Saga* was Sibelius's answer. He revised it substantially in 1902, at the request of the

Italian composer and conductor Ferruccio Busoni, who wanted to present it in Berlin. The German performances confirmed Sibelius as the international face of Finnish nationalism.

The title translates as a fairy tale or a saga, which naturally invites a search for a narrative, but there isn't one. Sibelius resisted the idea firmly. '*En Saga* is the expression of a state of mind,' he wrote. 'I had undergone a number of painful experiences at the time, and in no other work have I revealed myself so completely.' He wanted the music to speak for itself and insisted that all programmatic interpretations - trying to read a story directly into the music - were anathema to his way of thinking.

The piece opens in a shimmer of muted strings, expectant and slightly unreal, before a long, melancholy melody emerges in the bassoons, cellos and basses, noble and folk-inflected but without actually quoting any folk tunes. The music builds and subsides through a series of contrasting episodes, including a rhythmically charged theme on the violas and a more martial string idea, before the horns announce a powerful climax with all the authority of a Nordic legend. Those who know Sibelius's other works will recognise the fingerprints throughout: the

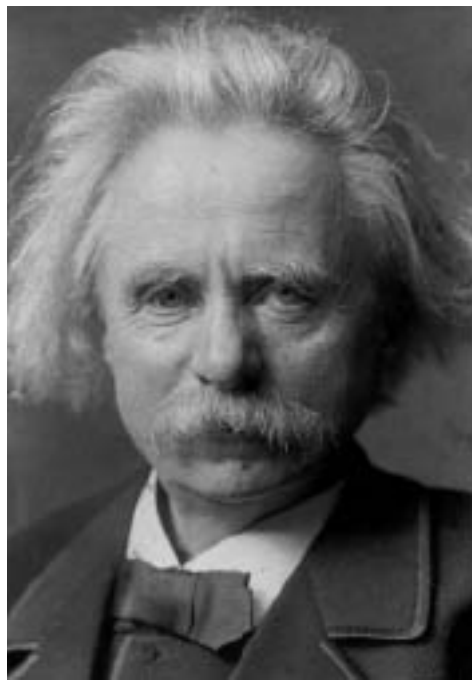
plaintive woodwind solos, the tremolo strings creating a sense of vast cold space, the long Scandinavian-sounding tunes arching upwards towards great orchestral peaks. It reflects the Finnish landscape, a seemingly endless vista of lakes and forests, in permanent twilight and covered in thick snow. The work eventually withdraws from all of that grandeur, a reflective duet for oboes giving way to a lone clarinet, and a final quiet dissolution into the winter darkness.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Peer Gynt Suite No 1, Op. 46

Like many nineteenth century European composers, Grieg was an avowed nationalist and set out to write music that was unmistakably Norwegian either in its name or in its use of folk melodies. As a friend of the playwright Henrik Ibsen, he was asked to provide some incidental music for a new play. Unlike Ibsen's previous dramas, *Peer Gynt* was written in verse and not originally intended for stage performance, but Ibsen changed his mind. Flattered to have received the invitation, Grieg agreed at once, but doubt soon set in. After initially complaining that it was 'the most unmusical of subjects', he produced twenty-three short pieces which

he later reworked into two suites. The music was completed in the autumn of 1875, and the play's premiere took place in February 1876 in Christiania (now Oslo), with the orchestra conducted by Grieg himself.



Like Sibelius's *Lemminkäinen* in *Kalevala*, Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*, and Kodaly's *Hány János*, Peer Gynt is a complex villain of the kind that has inspired many composers.

The first suite opens with the Prelude to Act IV, Morning, but the sun is rising over the Moroccan desert rather than Norwegian

fjords as Peer Gynt's travels had taken him all over the world. It begins in the woodwind, where a pastoral melody develops over steady consistent bass notes, which varies in intensity before quietly fading away.

The second movement, The Death of Åse, refers to Peer's mother, whom he had locked in the attic after an argument. This didn't do much for her well-being, and on his return, finding her dying, Peer creates a fantasy about a wild horseback ride for her to meet up with St. Peter. In contrast however, the music is a gentle lament for strings alone. A simple poignant melody is repeated three times, followed by a related theme which gradually fades away to nothing.

The third movement, Anitra's Dance which is also for strings has the pulse of a Polish mazurka, although again, it is set in North Africa and reflects the nineteenth century orientalist obsession with far-off places, and exotic sounds. Peer has pretended to be a prophet and is smoking a pipe in the tent of an Arab chieftain. While enjoying the singing and dancing of a group of Arabian girls, his gaze fixes on the seductive Anitra, an Arabic sounding name that Ibsen invented. Muted strings are joined only by a triangle.

The final movement, In the Hall

of the Mountain King returns to Norway. Peer has met a woman dressed in green who has taken him to the palace of her father, the King of the Trolls. Peer almost accepts the kingdom and the hand of the Troll princess but backs out at the last minute, getting cold feet at the prospect of giving up his human identity. The grotesque music of the mountain people becomes more and more menacing as it grows in volume. At the end of the movement, Peer is lucky to escape with his life.

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Symphony No. 4 “The Inextinguishable” (Op. 29)

I Allegro

II Poco allegretto

III Poco adagio quasi andante

IV Allegro

Denmark’s best-known composer, was born to a poor but musical family on the large island of Funen, also the birthplace of Denmark’s best-known writer Hans Christian Andersen. He learned the violin and piano from an early age, and later brass instruments in order to play with a military band. His musical studies progressed at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen, and he supported himself as an orchestral

violinist while composing: his 1894 First Symphony began to gain success outside Denmark while the pressure of work put strain on his marriage to a strong-willed sculptor who bore three of his five children. They remained married but endured extended periods of separation. Old enough to have met Brahms, and young enough to have been an influence on Shostakovich, Nielsen’s music spans the boundary between Romanticism and Modernism, wearing its heart on its sleeve whilst also pushing the limits of tonality and form.



The Fourth Symphony was composed as WW1 raged around

Europe: Nielsen wrote to his wife in 1914 that 'I have an idea for a new composition, which has no programme but will express what we understand by the spirit of life [...] just life and motion, very varied yet connected, and constantly on the move, in one big movement or stream. I must have a word or a short title to express this; I cannot quite explain what I want, but what I want is good.' The symphony was completed in 1916 and named "Inextinguishable" (*Det Uudslukkelige* in Danish), referring to the human will to live despite all surrounding troubles. Nielsen was keen to stress that the subtitle was 'not a programme, but only a suggestion about the right approach to the music.' For him, music did not merely depict or describe life; it embodied life in all its primal force. Unlike painting or literature, he argued, music does not represent or paraphrase existence, it is existence: the basic emotion that lies beneath everything that makes birds sing, animals fight, and humans exult, moan and cry out without explanation.

The symphony is composed in four movements played without breaks, respectively energetic but lyrical - a calm Brahms-like intermezzo, an intense, throbbing slow movement and a fiercely triumphant finale which incorporates previous

themes and includes a notable battle between two sets of timpani. The first movement opens with a violent outburst, and a three-note motif introduced at the very start threads its way through much of what follows. Sudden swings between rage and tenderness are a constant feature, before a richly harmonised passage marked *Glorioso* gradually subsides into the second movement. This allegretto has a whimsical, folk-like character, concluding with what sounds very much like a cuckoo call from the clarinets, a moment of calm that does almost nothing to prepare the listener for what follows. The slow movement opens with something close to an animal howl from the strings, punctuated by timpani stabs; obsessive and almost operatic in its intensity, it builds to an enormous climax before closing over trilling violins, barely audible, with a large pause before the finale erupts. The two sets of timpani are placed at opposite sides of the orchestra, and Nielsen instructed both players to maintain 'a certain threatening character even when they play quietly.' The symphony eventually resolves into a shining major key, though after everything that has preceded it, the sense that the struggle is far from over is hard to shake. As Nielsen himself remarked: 'Music is life, and, like life, inextinguishable.'

Birmingham Town Hall

Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra: Mahler 2 - The Resurrection

14 Jun 2026

Sunday 3:00pm

£10 (U25) - £20



Bruckner: Psalm 150

Brahms: How lovely are thy dwellings

Non-Playing Members

If you would like to become more involved with the orchestra, there are a variety of tasks and activities that are open to friends of the orchestra as well as to players. We'd love some extra help with refreshments at Tuesday rehearsals, and ticket sales on concert days. In return, we offer complimentary tickets for all our concerts, visits to rehearsals and other benefits! Please email if you'd like more information.

info@solihullsymphony.org.uk

Our Mailing List

If you've enjoyed this concert, why not sign up to our Supporters' Newsletter to make sure you don't miss out on future events? You'll receive advance notice of the full season's programme, and reminders about all our concerts a few weeks in advance.

www.solihullsymphony.org.uk/mailling-list



Solihull Symphony Orchestra

Patron: The Mayor of Solihull



First Violins

Charlotte Beresford

leader

Marina Battey

Lis Branson

Vivienne Brown

Peter Halldron

Elena Lemke

Jo Oswald

Sarah Sasse

Will Scott

Anika Vairavaraja

Second Violins

David Roper

Charlotte McLuskie

John Bayley

Ella Begley

Stephanie Byrne

Sanjana Cherukad

Jessica Harris

Rosy Hughes

Sarah Letters

John Maxwell

Sue Walker

Susannah Watson

Violas

Kelvin Farge

Hannah Branson

Leah Broadfield

Joanna Clarke

Mark Emms

Cellos

Nicola Walters

Helen Atherton

Jeremy Dale

Kim Free

Alison Hart

Anne Kemp

Louise Robertson

Double Bass

David Evans

Flutes

Su Newton Ede

Mary Wright

Chris Kelland

Oboes

Sarah Vaughan

Fiona Speak

Duncan Spiers

Clarinets

Victoria Rex

Jane Emms

Karen Bannister

Bassoons

Harry Jones

Simon Gates

Poppy Mattock

Horns

Tim Overton

Sarah Gee

Stephen Mayes

Emma McLeod

Edward Fisher

Trumpets

David Hirst

Trombones

Ian Rae

Tony Miller

Bernard Moses

Tuba

Paul Arthur

Timpani

Percussion



About the Orchestra

Solihull Symphony Orchestra is an diverse and friendly group that enjoys taking on the challenge of a varied repertoire with professional leadership and inspiring soloists.

We are always open to new members, especially violin, viola and double bass players. A commitment to attend rehearsals regularly, and a willingness to learn are more important than formal music qualifications. We like to perform in different venues around Solihull, and welcome invitations to play at special events.

Rehearsals are held at Shirley Methodist Church every Tuesday from 19:30 until 21:45 during school term time, with at least four concert performances each year.



Our Next Concert

Saturday 5 July 2026, 19:30

Shirley Methodist Church

Magic, Masks and Mischief

Milhaud – Le Boeuf sur le Toit

Stravinsky – Firebird Suite

Rossini/Respighi – La Boutique Fantasque

Conductor - Tommaso Nista



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