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# Philharmonia

Press release

Friday 19 June 2020

## Philharmonia Orchestra announces Sheku Kanneh-Mason and John Wilson for new online concert series – The Philharmonia Sessions

The **Philharmonia Orchestra** has today announced **The Philharmonia Sessions** – a summer programme of three world class free **digital concerts**, broadcast on YouTube and conceived and created especially for an online audience. Whilst live music remains almost entirely inaccessible due to COVID-19, globally renowned musicians will come together with the Orchestra to create bespoke concerts for viewers and listeners to enjoy at home with friends or family. The three concerts will each be 50 minutes long and performed and recorded in accordance with social distancing rules.

The first concert will be broadcast on **Friday 17th July at 7pm** and will see cellist **Sheku Kanneh-Mason** join the Orchestra to perform **Saint-Saëns** Cello Concerto No. 1, in a programme that also includes **Vaughan Williams's** *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, both conducted by **John Wilson**.

**Sheku Kanneh-Mason** MBE, one of the brightest young stars on the classical music scene, became a household name worldwide in May 2018 after performing at the wedding of TRH the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. His performance was greeted with universal excitement after being watched by nearly two billion people globally. He was the winner of the 2016 BBC Young Musician competition and in January 2018 he released his debut recording for Decca classics, *Inspiration*. In June 2018, he received the Male Artist of the Year and the Critics' Choice Awards at the Classic BRIT Awards, and in July 2018 became the first artist to receive the new BRIT Certified Breakthrough Award, having sold over 30,000 copies of his debut album in the UK and surpassing 100,000 album sales worldwide. In January 2020, he released his second album which reached No. 8 in the UK official album chart, making Sheku the youngest classical instrumentalist and the first cellist in history to reach the UK top 10. Sheku made his debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 2018 and performed the Elgar Cello Concerto with the Orchestra (May 2019).

**John Wilson** is one of Britain's leading and most versatile conductors, appearing every season with the Philharmonia Orchestra in a broad repertoire including one of his greatest passions, English music. Since forming the John Wilson Orchestra in 1994, dedicated to performing music from the golden age of Hollywood and Broadway, John Wilson has also been in demand at the highest level across the globe, working with some of the finest orchestras and opera houses. In the UK, he performs regularly at festivals such as Aldeburgh, Glyndebourne and the BBC Proms. Elsewhere, he has conducted the Royal



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Concertgebouw, Budapest Festival, Swedish Radio Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic and Sydney Symphony orchestras amongst others. He has a large and varied discography which includes a series exploring the works of Richard Rodney Bennett and one devoted to the symphonic works of Aaron Copland. He has recently re-formed the Sinfonia of London to record an album of Korngold (which won a BBC Music Magazine Award) as well as French music. In March 2019, John Wilson was awarded the prestigious ISM Distinguished Musician Award for his services to music.

Performed with a chamber-size orchestra, the **Philharmonia Sessions** will be filmed several days in advance of their broadcast and will be presented alongside documentary material about the process of creating socially distanced performances in the unique current circumstances. The full programme will be announced in due course. All three of the concerts will be viewable on the Philharmonia's [YouTube channel](#). During the broadcasts, the Orchestra will ask those that can to make a donation. Access to the arts is a fundamental right, so the Philharmonia Sessions are free and for everyone. However, this work, and the Orchestra's ability to plan for the future is only made possible thanks to the support of Friends and Donors. Audience donations will keep the Philharmonia playing and secure the future of the Orchestra.

**Michael Fuller**, Interim Managing Director of the Philharmonia Orchestra, said: *"We are delighted to be presenting the first Philharmonia performances since we last stood together on stage at our Southbank Centre home, on Sunday 15 March 2020. As has been the case for the entire performing arts sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought extraordinary artistic, financial and organisational challenges, but we have been determined to move as quickly as possible to getting the orchestra playing again, and to return to serving our audiences."*

*Having invested in a Digital programme of work for over a decade, the Philharmonia is in a good position to create this new format and continue our sector-leading work. The Philharmonia Sessions are free and for everyone, and will be supported by the generosity of our audiences, Friends and supporters. We want to offer this music to all during this unexpected and difficult time and we hope it brings some measure of comfort and healing. We are simply thrilled to be performing again."*

END

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

### Listings:

#### **The Philharmonia Sessions, part I: Sheku performs Saint-Saëns**

Friday 17 July 2020, 7pm

John Wilson – conductor  
Sheku Kanneh-Mason – cello

SAINT-SAËNS Cello Concerto No. 1  
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*

#### **The Philharmonia Sessions, part II**

Date and time to be confirmed

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Artists and repertoire to be confirmed

## **The Philharmonia Sessions, part III**

Date and time to be confirmed

Artists and repertoire to be confirmed

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### Credits:

The Philharmonia is proud to be supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

A registered charity, the Orchestra relies on individual and corporate generosity to deliver its programme.

The Philharmonia's Principal International Partner is Wuliangye.

### Biography:

#### **Philharmonia Orchestra**

The Philharmonia is a world-class symphony orchestra for the 21st century. Based in London at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, the Philharmonia creates thrilling performances for a global audience. Through its network of residencies, the Orchestra has a national footprint, serving communities across England both in performance and through its extensive outreach and engagement programme.

Founded in 1945, in part as a recording orchestra for the nascent home audio market, today the Philharmonia uses the latest digital technology to reach new audiences for symphonic music. The Philharmonia is led by Finnish conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen, its Principal Conductor & Artistic Advisor since 2008. Fellow Finn Santtu-Matias Rouvali takes over from Salonen as Principal Conductor in the 2021/22 season.

The Orchestra's home is Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, in the heart of London, where the Philharmonia has been resident since 1995. Southbank Centre is currently closed due to COVID-19, but the Philharmonia is working closely with the venue to plan its return to live performance.

Under Salonen and other key conductors, the Philharmonia has created a series of critically-acclaimed, visionary projects, distinctive for both their artistic scope and supporting live and digital content. Recent series include *City of Light: Paris 1900-1950* (2015) and *Stravinsky: Myths & Rituals* (2016), which won a South Bank Sky

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Arts Award. In 2019, Salonen presented *Weimar Berlin: Bittersweet Metropolis*, a celebration of the feverish creativity of the Weimar era through the prism of its music, drama and film. Orchestral programming is complemented by series including Philharmonia at the Movies, Music of Today, the Philharmonia Chamber Players and an Insights programme.

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