

PRESS RELEASE

1 May 2025

CBSO REVEALS BOLD 2025-26 SEASON

Birmingham's cultural powerhouse bridges classical tradition and contemporary innovation



Click [here](#) to view the full 2025-26 season brochure, watch the season launch film and download images.

The **City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra** (CBSO) today unveils its 2025-26 season, presenting a bold vision of a future facing orchestra – one that demonstrates artistic excellence while also reflecting and engaging with the diverse communities it serves, under the artistic leadership of Music Director Kazuki Yamada.

New research from the orchestra's regional 'Listening Project' – a West-Midlands focused research initiative reveals that live music in Birmingham is seen to be an integral aspect of life in and around the city. Across Birmingham, 79% of residents have attended local venues in the last year and 57% felt no need to travel outside the city to hear great music. Further, 60% of residents say that supporting local cultural events is a key aspect of how they enjoy their free time.

"Our new season is a magnificent celebration of music" says Emma Stenning, CBSO Chief Executive, who promises that 2025-26 will deliver "joy filled concerts for everyone, whether you find us at Symphony Hall, across Birmingham and the West Midlands, or on national and international tour led by our incredible Music Director, Kazuki Yamada".

She adds: "Birmingham is our inspiration. Our home city is fantastically musical, and full of diversity and creative adventure. This new season is drawn from exactly that spirit, and presents

us to the world as a truly future facing orchestra, that both celebrates the great classical repertoire, and dares to try something new”.

“As you delve into what’s on offer, we hope that you will discover music that moves you, uplifts you and offers you moments of celebration and reflection. We very much look forward to welcoming you to a concert soon”.

CBSO at a glance: 2025-26 season highlights

Representing Birmingham’s Identity on the world stage

Following the CBSO’s pioneering concerts with Birmingham’s grime and rap artists, the new season reinforces the CBSO’s position as a trailblazer in engaging audiences through cross-genre collaboration and commissions:

- **Kazuki Yamada** enters his second year as Music Director, leading more than 10 concerts in Birmingham, including performances of monumental works such as Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue, Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade and Rachmaninoff’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini.
- **Black Lives in Music** brings a taste of their celebrated classical music festival to Birmingham with the return of award-winning singer-songwriter Laura Mvula to her hometown.
- **The CBSO & The Orchestral Qawwali Project**, a glorious blend of Sufi poetry, Indian Classical dance and symphony orchestra returns to Birmingham.
- **Rushil Ranjan** leads an evening that celebrates the musical and spiritual connections between western and eastern classical music.
- **Satnam Rana presents Bringing the Light**, an evening dedicated to celebrating light and winter festivals, including new commissions from contemporary voices including Cassie Kinoshi, Joan Armatrading and Roxanna Panufnik.
- **At home in Birmingham, but sharing great music across the UK and around the world.** In March 2026, Kazuki Yamada will lead the orchestra on tour, performing 13 concerts right across Europe.

Innovation in Artistic Excellence

The ambitious season brings together artistic heavyweights and innovative programming, from small ensemble concerts at the CBSO Centre to epic large-scale repertoire unleashing the full force of the orchestra:

- **A full Mahler Symphony Cycle** begins over the next few years, with Yamada conducting Symphony No.1 during the 2025-26 season.
- **Choral and opera showstoppers** include Elgar’s The Dream of Gerontius, Puccini’s Tosca (featuring an all-Welsh cast of singers - Natalya Romaniw, Gwyn Hughes Jones and Sir Bryn Terfel) and Adams’ Harmonium.
- **CBSO in the City** returns with a week of free performances across Birmingham.
- **Star Wars Original Trilogy Weekender, Best of Bond** and **Symphonic Queen** all feature, alongside core symphonic repertoire including; Bartók, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, Strauss and Nielsen.
- **The season welcomes incredible guests, debuts and guest conductors** including Carlo Rizzi, Davóne Tines, Gemma New, Ilan Volkov, Isata Kanneh-Mason, Janai Brugger, Lisa Batiashvili, Nil Venditti, Seong-Jin Cho and Sir Stephen Hough.

Enriching, inclusive experiences

- **Supporting Young Musicians:** Building on the CBSO's passionate education ethos - evident daily within the Shireland CBSO Academy – talented young musicians from across the UK (CBSO Youth Orchestra) will join Joshua Weilerstein alongside CBSO musicians for an evening of Shostakovich.
- **Concerts for the whole family:** The CBSO will present 36 concerts specifically designed for young people as part of the new season, including 4 family concerts featuring music from movies and books, as well as a festive Christmas concert.
- **Pushing boundaries on audience engagement:** The CBSO will also present '**Cuppa concerts**' suitable for those living with dementia, their carers, family and friends. The interactive '**Notelets**' concerts will give young children the freedom to dance, sing and learn about musical instruments for the first time. Added to this, '**Relaxed Concerts**' will enable pupils attending Special Schools to experience live music in a supported, accessible and engaging environment.

Kazuki Yamada, CBSO Music Director and RPS Conductor of the Year commented: "From symphonies to soundtracks, Beethoven to Bernstein, classics to world premieres - our 2025-26 season embodies what a modern orchestra should be – deeply rooted in the classical tradition, while simultaneously being bold in engaging with contemporary culture. This season is a celebration of musical diversity and an invitation for audiences to connect even more deeply with the CBSO. As we tour and perform, we want to showcase why culture and music are essential to us all."

Catherine Arlidge, Director of Artistic Planning and former CBSO violinist, added: "Our season marries the global with the local. Whilst the variety within our season is informed by understanding our wide-ranging and diverse local audiences, we are also thrilled that so many top international artists will be joining us in Birmingham – Sir Bryn Terfel, Lisa Batiashvili, Osmo Vänskä, Vilde Frang and the Jussen brothers to name but a few. At a time of international geo-political tensions, our concerts celebrate so many different musical voices - and remind us all about music's power to unite people. Our orchestra is a living, breathing entity, nourished both by the incredible artists we work with and the audiences we perform for. Considering our art form as a dialogue has been key to this season - a season about celebrating home – on the world stage."

To explore the 2025-26 CBSO season in full visit cbsoco.uk/season. Tickets for the new season go on sale from **Wednesday 21 May 2025, 10am**.

Media enquiries: For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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Notes to editors

About the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO)

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) is an internationally celebrated symphony orchestra, at home in Birmingham. A family of 90 incredible musicians, led by Music Director Kazuki Yamada, proud to make exciting musical experiences that matter to the people of Birmingham, the West Midlands and beyond.

Resident at Symphony Hall, the orchestra's musicians perform over 150 concerts each year in Birmingham, the UK and around the world, with music that ranges from classics to contemporary, soundtracks to symphonies, and everything in between. With a far-reaching community and education programme, a ground-breaking partnership with Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust, and a family of choruses and youth ensembles, it is involved in every aspect of music-making in the Midlands – and has been for more than 100 years.

This longstanding tradition started with the orchestra's very first symphonic concert in 1920 – conducted by Sir Edward Elgar. Ever since then, through war, recessions, social change and civic renewal, the CBSO has been proudly 'Birmingham's orchestra'. Under principal conductors including Adrian Boult, George Weldon, Andrzej Panufnik and Louis Frémaux, the CBSO won an artistic reputation that spread far beyond the Midlands. But it was when it discovered the young British conductor Simon Rattle in 1980 that the CBSO became internationally famous – and showed how the arts can help give a new sense of direction to a whole city.

Rattle's successors, Sakari Oramo, Andris Nelsons and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, helped cement that global reputation and continued to build on the CBSO's tradition of flying the flag for Birmingham. In April 2023, Emma Stenning was appointed Chief Executive and Kazuki Yamada took up the post of Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor, and in May 2024 became Music Director. Under their dynamic leadership, the orchestra continues to celebrate the joy of music and of Birmingham through creating unmissable and unforgettable musical experiences for all.

The CBSO is supported by its principal funders Arts Council England and SCC.