



MALTA  
PHILHARMONIC  
ORCHESTRA



**BEETHOVEN**  
**4** **BRAHMS**



# BEETHOVEN 4 BRAHMS

**Ilyich Rivas**  
Conductor

**Malta Philharmonic Orchestra**

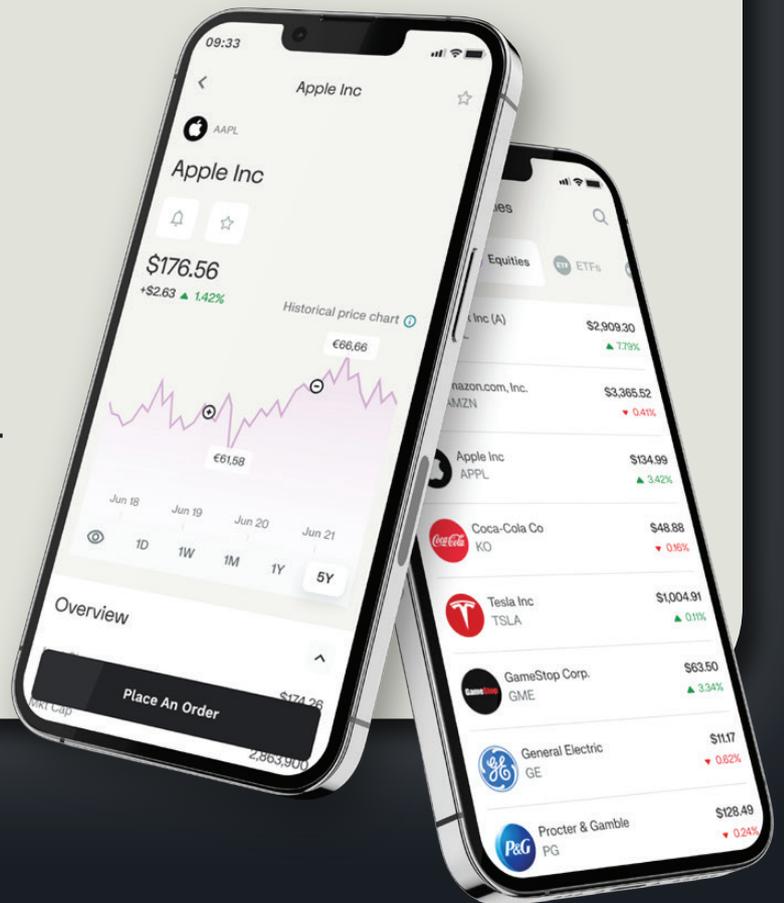
**Saturday, 25th February, 7.30PM**  
Teatru tal-Opra Aurora, Gozo

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# PROGRAMME

## **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Symphony No. 4, Op. 60

- I. Adagio – Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio
- III. Scherzo-trio: Allegro vivace
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

## **Johannes Brahms**

Symphony No. 4, Op. 98

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andante moderato
- III. Allegro giocoso
- IV. Allegro energico e passionato

# PROGRAMME NOTES

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (Bonn, Germany 1770 – Vienna, Austria 1827)  
Symphony No. 4, Op. 60 (1806)

Beethoven straddles two musical eras – the Classical and the Romantic. On the one hand, his music never lost its Classical ethos, particularly in its concern with balance and clarity of structure. On the other hand, Beethoven had little qualms about subverting established forms and surprising his listeners in the interests of heightened expression. In this regard, the Third and Fifth symphonies were particularly ground-breaking, paving the way for Beethoven's later symphonies and, indeed, for the great symphonic repertoire of the 19th Century. This has tended to eclipse the Fourth Symphony, with its more clearly "Classical" approach looking back to the works of Joseph Haydn. This neglect was felt even during Beethoven's lifetime, with a critic questioning, already in 1814, why this symphony had never been "exhaustively reviewed" and claiming that the work "did not deserve any less than the others".

Beethoven composed the Fourth symphony in 1806, during a summer vacation at the palace of Count Franz von Oppersdorff, to whom the work is dedicated. Indeed, it is sometimes claimed that the Haydnesque style of the piece is a result of the Count's own liking for the older composer, which may have had a bearing on Beethoven's approach to the work. Be that as it may, the result was a sunny piece, brimming with good spirits – and one in which, in Haydn's tradition, Beethoven had a couple of good-natured musical jokes up his sleeve.

The symphony follows a traditional four-movement structure. The opening Allegro movement is preceded by a mysterious, slow introduction before settling into the B Flat major key of the piece with a theme which has been described as "gaiety itself, and most original gaiety". The ensuing Adagio is a rondo – a musical form based on a recurring theme. A characteristic of the Adagio is a tick-tocking

figure in the accompaniment which threads its way throughout the whole movement – a typically Haydnesque touch.

In the third movement, Beethoven varies the Classical “minuet and trio” format, replacing the more graceful ‘minuet’ of his predecessors with a faster and more boisterous ‘scherzo’. The ‘trio’ section provides contrast through a slightly slower tempo and more prominent passages for woodwind. The Symphony ends with a jovial finale built on a *moto perpetuo*, that is, a fast, repeated figure which creates an incessant “motor rhythm”. Beethoven himself referred to the playful style he adopts here as *aufgeknöpft* – “unbuttoned”. The closing bars give another nod to Haydn – in the finale, the main theme of the movement returns at half speed, punctuated by pauses, before a *fortissimo* on the full orchestra. Thus ends the work described by composer Robert Schumann as a “slender Greek maiden between two Norse Giants”.

## **Johannes Brahms** (Hamburg, Germany 1833 – Vienna, Austria 1897)

### Symphony No. 4, Op. 98 (1884 - 1885)

The shadow of Beethoven hung heavily over Brahms. “I shall never write a symphony! You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like him behind us,” he reputedly told conductor Hermann Levi. Brahms’s first symphony, clearly moulded on the master’s works, had a long gestation – Brahms spent nearly twenty years working on it prior to its first performance in 1876. Having overcome this hurdle, it seems Brahms quickly vanquished his “composer’s block” – his remaining three symphonies followed in a relatively short span of time: the Second in 1877, the Third in 1882 – 83, and the Fourth in 1884-85.

The Fourth is the pinnacle of Brahms’s symphonic achievements. It is based on a rigorous formal approach – not only are its four movements built on carefully-planned structures, but they are also linked together by recurring themes and musical gestures. What is surprising is that the result is not simply a dry, cerebral piece but also one which audiences since its premiere have found very moving.

Like Beethoven’s Fourth, Brahms’s Fourth was also written while its composer was on holiday, in the case of Brahms, in the Styrian Alps. The first two movements were completed in the summer of 1884, and the final two in the summer of the following year. Appropriately, given the environment in which it was written, composer Clara Schumann used a metaphor based on the natural world to describe the opening *Allegro non troppo*: “It is as though one lay in springtime among the blossoming flowers, and joy and sorrow filled one’s soul in turn.” This sense of duality and ambivalence is immediately evident in the symphony’s opening theme, built on falling thirds, which will prove to be a unifying motif throughout the whole work. The slow second movement has a nocturnal atmosphere. It begins with a call on the horns, followed by woodwind passages, before the strings introduce a lyrical melody. The use of the Phrygian mode, often found in medieval and Renaissance music, gives the movement an archaic flavour. Shadows are dispelled in the ensuing *Allegro giocoso* which, as suggested by the tempo indication, is lively and playful – a true scherzo in which the piccolo and triangle add a sparkle to the orchestral texture.

The most tightly structured of the symphony's movements is the last one. Brahms draws a theme from the bass line of Johann Sebastian Bach's final cantata – *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*, BWV 150 – and subjects it to thirty-two variations over a repeated bass, thus creating a giant passacaglia. The theme is announced by an ominous eight-chord chorale played by the full orchestra, joined for the first time by a choir of trombones. The music leads us through a variety of emotions, although throughout there is a sense of tragedy and inevitability. The words of the Bach cantata on which the movement is based declare “All my days which pass in suffering, God ends at last in joy.” Brahms was not a religious person in the conventional sense of the word, but there is a poignancy in this extra-musical connection which suggests a laboured search for happiness – a joy which, at the end of the symphony, remains frustratingly out of reach.

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# ILYICH RIVAS

## Conductor

Venezuelan-born American conductor Ilyich Rivas made his professional debut at the age of 16 in front of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and has subsequently made successful debuts with a number of important orchestras in Europe and the US, including the London Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hanover, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Orquesta Sinfonica de Castilla y Leon and the Orquesta Sinfonica de Galicia.

Ilyich Rivas worked as Assistant Conductor with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, culminating in his official debut in their subscription series at the Royal Festival Hall. He was also awarded the two-year position of Baltimore Symphony Orchestra/Peabody Institute Conducting fellow, studying conducting at the Peabody Conservatory under the guidance of legendary pedagogue Gustav Meier, and working closely with Marin Alsop and the Baltimore Symphony, again including in subscription concerts. He was invited by Michael Tilson Thomas to conduct the YouTube Symphony Orchestra at the Sydney Opera House, and has additionally gained significant experience with young players and student ensembles, having conducted the Verbier Festival Orchestra, the orchestras of London's Royal College of Music and the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne, the Youth Orchestra of the Americas and the Youth Orchestra of Bahia, Brazil.

Highlights of recent seasons include his debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lyon, Auckland Philharmonia, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Poznań Philharmonic, Norrköping Symphony, Uppsala Symphony, Brno Philharmonic, Cameristi della Scala and the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern, as well as performances at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival with the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hanover. More recent engagements include his hugely successful Paris debut with the Orchestre national d'Île-de-France at the Paris Philharmonie, and also the National Symphony Orchestra (formerly RTE) in Dublin.

Ilyich Rivas has also developed a notable expertise as an operatic conductor. Following a three-year mentoring programme under conductor Vladimir Jurowski at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, he was invited to conduct full productions for Glyndebourne on Tour of *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Hänsel und Gretel* in consecutive seasons. He made an impressive debut with the UK's Opera North conducting performances of *La Bohème*, and recently debuted with the Netherlands Reisopera in a country-wide touring production of *La Traviata*.

Ilyich Rivas comes from a distinguished musical family, and studied conducting from an early age with his father Alejandro Rivas, an orchestral conductor himself, who continues to be his principal guide and mentor. Ilyich has been awarded the Bruno Walter Conducting Prize and the Prix Julius Baer in Switzerland, given by the Verbier Festival to a musician of exceptional talent.



# MALTA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

For half a century, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) has been Malta's foremost musical institution.

The orchestra was founded in April 1968, when musicians from the defunct "Commander-in-Chief" (C-in-C) orchestra of the Malta-based British Mediterranean Fleet regrouped as the Manoel Theatre Orchestra. It continued to serve as the theatre's resident orchestra until September 1997, when it became an independent orchestra, taking up the name National Orchestra of Malta. The orchestra became the MPO in 2008 when it expanded into a full-size symphony orchestra, bringing together musicians from Malta, Europe and beyond.

Joseph Sammut, the C-in-C's last conductor, was the orchestra's first conductor, remaining at the helm until 1992. Since then, the orchestra has also been under the direction of Joseph Vella, John Galea, Michael Laus, and Brian Schembri. In 2019, the MPO has appointed Sergey Smbatyan as Principal Conductor, joining Resident Conductor Michael Laus as part of the orchestra's Artistic Team. The MPO also works with local and international guest artists including Lawrence Renes, Diana Damrau, José Cura, Mikhail Pletnev, Gil Shaham, Joseph Calleja, Gautier Capuçon, Daniel Lozakovich and Enrico Dindo.

As Malta's leading musical ensemble, the MPO averages more than one performance a week including symphonic concerts, opera productions in Malta and Gozo, community outreach and educational initiatives, as well as various concerts of a lighter nature. During the past seasons, the MPO embarked on a Digital Transformation reaching over 32 million people worldwide through its Online Programme in 2021.

The orchestra has performed in leading venues across the globe, including in the United States, Russia, Dubai, Germany, Austria, China, Italy, and Belgium, and presently embarks on at least one international tour each concert season.

The MPO is a keen exponent of Maltese composers, regularly performing their works in Malta and overseas, as well as frequently premiering and commissioning new compositions.

Through the MPO Academy and the Malta Youth Orchestra, which regularly give concerts across Malta, the MPO is also responsible for the training and professional development of the next generation of Maltese musicians.

# MPO MUSICIANS

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Anna Kosinska  
Maria Conrad  
Agnieszka Kuźma  
Vincenzo Picone  
Emilia Wiśniewska  
Elena Imperato  
Klara Nazaj  
Riccardo Rossano  
Fiona Giambra  
Eduardo Garcia Salas  
Stephen Scerri

## **Violin 2**

Matteo Colombo\*  
Inmaculada Muñoz Salgüero  
Stefan Calleja  
Valhvor Montfort  
Rosanne Dimech  
Francesca Moldovan  
Stephen Debattista  
Mario Micallef  
Bernard Curmi  
Angelo Spadafora

## **Viola**

Alexandre Razera\*  
Mateusz Kuźma  
Marco Gallina  
Savio Debono  
Ester Garcia Salas  
Matthew Fenech  
Brian Agius  
Joseph Mallia

## **Cello**

Ákos Kertészs\*  
Yaroslav Miklukho  
Frank Camilleri  
Lucie Kuchařová  
Desirée Calleja  
Fiona Murphy

## **Double Bass**

Gjorgji Cincievski\*  
Michelle Agius  
Dion Xuereb  
Marco Agnetti

## **Flute**

Rebecca Hall\*  
Fiorella Camilleri

## **Oboe**

John McDonough\*  
Chiara Telleri

## **Clarinet**

Giuseppe Recchia\*  
Daniele Galletto

## **Bassoon**

Giacomo Cella\*  
Lampros-Ioannis Lapinas  
Maria Spiteri Zahra

## **Horn**

Etienne Cutajar\*  
Manuele Catalano  
Marco Cola  
Bernardette Vella

## **Trumpet**

Kevin Abela\*  
Brendan Ball

## **Trombone**

Roderick Bugeja Calleja\*  
Dennis Camilleri  
Jesmond Azzopardi

## **Timpani**

Joseph CamilleriΔ

## **Percussion**

Jean Pierre CassarΔ

\*\* Orchestra Leader

\* Section Principal

Δ Guest Section Principal

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