Chineke! Foundation  
Orchestra

The Chineke! Foundation was created in 2015 to provide outstanding career opportunities to established and up-and-coming Black and ethnically diverse classical musicians in the UK and Europe. Chineke!’s motto is: *‘Championing change and celebrating diversity in classical music’*. The organisation aims to be a catalyst for change, realising existing diversity targets within the industry by increasing the representation of Black and ethnically diverse musicians in British and European orchestras.

The Foundation’s flagship ensemble, the Chineke! Orchestra, comprises exceptional musicians from across the continent brought together several times a year. As Europe’s first majority-Black and ethnically diverse orchestra, Chineke! performs standard orchestral repertoire along with the works of Black and ethnically diverse composers both past and present.

The Chineke! Orchestra works closely with its sister ensemble, the Chineke! Junior Orchestra, a youth orchestra of Black and ethnically diverse players aged between 11 and 22, with senior players acting as mentors, teachers and role models to the young musicians. Many of our junior musicians already benefit from existing youth schemes, junior music colleges and specialist music schools across the UK. The Chineke! Junior Orchestra acts as a bridge between such schemes and higher education, giving its players experience, encouragement and confidence, with the hope of increasing the numbers of Black and ethnically diverse candidates currently studying music at third level. This process has already begun, with several of the junior musicians having won national competitions, gained places at top music schools or been admitted to elite conservatoires and institutions.

Chineke! is the brainchild of Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE, who says: *‘My aim is to create a space where Black and ethnically diverse musicians can walk on stage and know that they belong, in every sense of the word. If even one Black and ethnically diverse child feels that their colour is getting in the way of their musical ambitions, then I hope to inspire them, give them a platform, and show them that music, of whatever kind, is for all people.’*

Many cultural organisations such as the BBC, Association of British Orchestras, Royal Philharmonic Society and Arts Council England agree with this sentiment, and have supported Chineke!. After its launch concert at Queen Elizabeth Hall in September 2015, the Chineke! Orchestra was appointed as an Associate Orchestra of Southbank Centre and has performed there and in other major venues across the UK and Europe.

Chineke! has been covered extensively by national and international press and broadcast media, and the Foundation’s work is featured prominently in the Government’s Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s White Paper on Culture published in 2016. The orchestra was shortlisted for the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards in both 2016 and 2017, and in 2019 was recognised with the very first ‘*Gamechanger’* Award for *“…inspirational and transformative work breaking new ground in classical music.”*

In 2017, the orchestra released its first album, and made its BBC Proms debut at the Royal Albert Hall in August, to much critical acclaim. In 2018, the orchestra gave the inaugural concert at the newly refurbished Queen Elizabeth Hall and performed there again in July as part of the Southbank Centre’s Africa Utopia festival. To date, Chineke! has released albums under Signum Records, Orchid Classics and NMC Recordings, with further releases planned in 2021.

The aims of the Chineke! Foundation and Orchestra are certainly ambitious. In the words of Sir Simon Rattle: *‘Chineke! is not only an exciting idea but a profoundly necessary one. The kind of idea which is so obvious that you wonder why it is not already in place. The kind of idea which could deepen and enrich classical music in the UK for generations. What a thrilling prospect!*