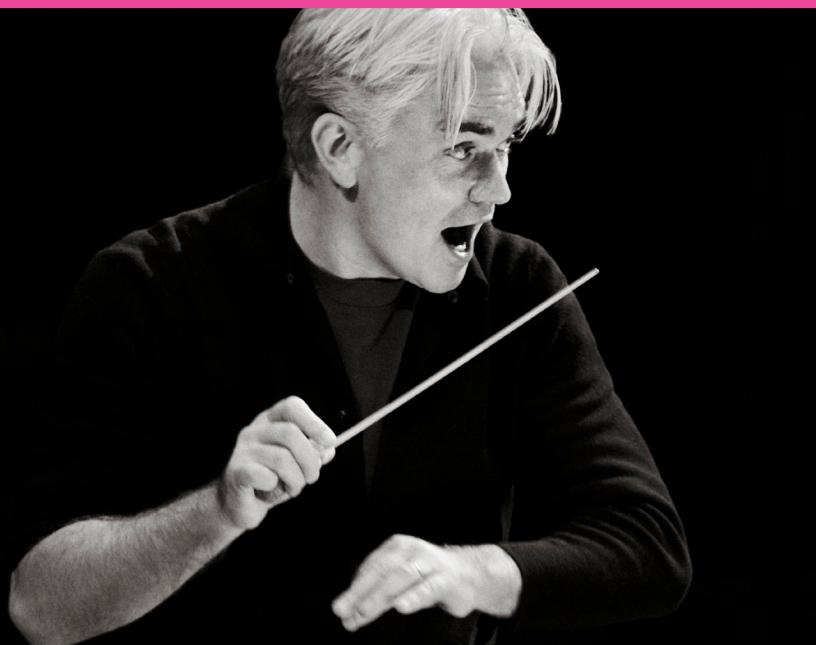




Free concert
programme

London Philharmonic Orchestra



2025/26 season
at the
Southbank Centre



**SOUTHBANK
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RESIDENT

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Principal Conductor Edward Gardner supported by Aud Jebsen

Principal Guest Conductor Karina Canellakis supported by Richard Buxton

Conductor Emeritus Vladimir Jurowski KBE Patron HRH The Duke of Kent KG

Artistic Director Jesús Herrera Chief Executive David Burke

Leader Pieter Schoeman supported by Neil Westreich

Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Wednesday 11 February 2026 | 7.30pm

Mother Goose

Scriabin

Symphony No. 4, Op. 54 (The Poem of Ecstasy) (22')

George Benjamin

Palimpsests (21')

Interval (20')

Stravinsky

Symphonies of Wind Instruments (9')

Ravel

Mother Goose (*complete ballet*) (28')

George Benjamin conductor

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The timings shown are not precise and are given only as a guide.
Concert presented by the London Philharmonic Orchestra

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ENGLAND**

Tonight in 2 minutes

New to classical? Short on time? Your quick guide to tonight's concert.

The vibe

Mother Goose

Tonight's concert is all about colour, contrasts and atmosphere. It opens and closes with pieces that let the orchestra really shine – rich, glowing and full of big, sweeping sounds. In between, the mood shifts: George Benjamin's piece plays with layered ideas that build and fade, while Stravinsky's music strips things back, focusing on bold, simple ideas and a lighter, more see-through sound.

Who's on stage?



Sir George Benjamin - conductor

George Benjamin is wearing two hats tonight: he's conducting the Orchestra, and he's also the composer of the second piece, *Palimpsests*.

As the Orchestra's current Composer-in-Residence, George will work closely with the players over several seasons, getting to know their sound, writing new pieces for them, and bringing his existing works to life in performance. Each season he also mentors the five up-and-coming composers selected for our LPO Young Composers programme.

George is one of the UK's leading contemporary composers. He has been composing since the 1980s, and is known for both his concert music and his four acclaimed operas. He's worked closely with major orchestras and festivals around the world, and since 2001 has been a Professor of Composition at King's College London. He was knighted in 2017.



The Orchestra

Tonight there are over 90 LPO musicians on stage. All at the very top of their game, they've studied and practised for years to perfect their craft. Our musicians represent over 14 different nationalities, and many enjoy busy solo, chamber and teaching careers alongside their orchestral work.

Turn to page 6 to see the full list of tonight's musicians.

What to expect

Take your seats...

The Orchestra tune up their instruments, then the conductor, George Benjamin, enters the stage. Once the applause dies down, sit back and enjoy the music ...



22 min

Alexander Scriabin

Symphony No. 4 (The Poem of Ecstasy)

Russian composer Alexander Scriabin believed music could express big spiritual and emotional ideas. This piece was inspired by a poem that he also wrote, about the human spirit growing and reaching a state of ecstasy.



22 min

George Benjamin

Palimpsests

George Benjamin based this piece on the idea of music being built in layers, like something written over again and again. Although it's sometimes discordant and challenging to listen to, it's fascinating how the musical ideas appear, disappear, and come back in new shapes.

Longer classical pieces are often made up of **movements**, or shorter sections. Applause is usually saved for after the final movement.



9 min

Igor Stravinsky

Symphonies of Wind Instruments

Just the woodwind and brass sections are on stage for this piece. It's made up of short contrasting sections that pass between different instruments, ending with a calm, chorale-like moment of reflection.



28 min

Maurice Ravel

Mother Goose

French composer Ravel wrote *Mother Goose* as a set of musical fairytales for children. It's full of colour and magic, with the orchestra painting soft, storybook scenes.

After the final piece, we applaud the Orchestra. The conductor will acknowledge the Leader (No. 1 First Violin), Pieter, and might highlight other players for particular appreciation and applause, with several rounds of bows bringing the evening to a celebratory close.

Want to read more? Turn to page 10 for a deeper dive into this evening's pieces.

Welcome

Welcome to the Southbank Centre

We're the UK's largest centre for the arts and one of the nation's top five visitor attractions, showcasing the world's most exciting artists at our venues in the heart of London. As a charity, we bring millions of people together by opening up the unique art spaces that we care for.

The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Hayward Gallery, National Poetry Library and Arts Council Collection. We're one of London's favourite meeting spots, with lots of free events and places to relax, eat and shop next to the Thames.

We hope you enjoy your visit. If you need any information or help, please ask a member of staff. You can also email hello@southbankcentre.co.uk or write to us at Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX.

Subscribers to our email updates are the first to hear about new events, offers and competitions. Just head to our website to sign up.

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LPO news

Just announced: *Strictly* dancers join the LPO



For our Saturday 21 March concert, 'Four Seasons of Buenos Aires' at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, we're excited to welcome BBC One's *Strictly Come Dancing* dancers Lauren Oakley and

Kai Widdrington, who will perform a live tango on stage during the concert.

We're thrilled that Lauren and Kai will also join us afterwards for an 'After Dark' post-concert performance from 8.30pm in the QEH foyer. LPO string players will perform an intimate set of tango music, featuring more live dance from Lauren and Kai.

'After Dark' tickets are £10, or free to ticket-holders for the main evening concert. Tickets for 'After Dark' are on sale from tomorrow, Thursday 12 February, via lpo.org.uk/whatson

LPO Junior Artists: Overture Day

Applications are open for our next LPO Junior Artists: Overture Day, which takes place on **Monday 30 March 2026** at St Gabriels College, London SW9 6UL.

If you're a young orchestral player aged 11–14 and Grade 4+ standard, this is your chance to join the London Philharmonic Orchestra family for a day. You'll meet some of our musicians, play as an ensemble and find out just what it takes to be part of one of the greatest orchestras in the world – for free! For more information, and to watch a video featuring previous Overture Day participants, visit lpo.org.uk/overture

Our Overture Days are free of charge and open to all orchestral players of the appropriate age and standard, but priority is given to young musicians from under-represented backgrounds and communities who may be eligible for our main LPO Junior Artists programme in the future.

LPO Junior Artists: Overture 2025/26 is generously supported by TIOC Foundation and Garfield Weston Foundation.

London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, the London Philharmonic Orchestra has been celebrated as one of the world's great orchestras since Sir Thomas Beecham founded it in 1932. Our mission is to share wonder with the modern world through the power of orchestral music, which we accomplish through live performances, online, and an extensive education and community programme, cementing our position as a leading orchestra for the 21st century.

Our home is at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, where we're at the beating heart of London's cultural life. You'll also find us at our resident venues in Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden, and on tour worldwide. In 2024 we celebrated 60 years as Resident Symphony Orchestra at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, combining the magic of opera with Glyndebourne's glorious setting in the Sussex countryside.

Soundtrack to key moments

Everyone will have heard the Grammy-nominated London Philharmonic Orchestra, whether it's playing the world's National Anthems for every medal ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, our iconic recording with Pavarotti that made *Nessun Dorma* a global football anthem, or closing the flotilla at The Queen's Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant. And you'll almost certainly have heard us on the soundtracks for major films including *The Lord of the Rings*.

Sharing the wonder worldwide

We're one of the world's most-streamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month. In 2023 we were the most successful orchestra worldwide on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, and in 2024 we featured in a TV documentary series on Sky Arts: 'Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra', which was nominated for a 2025 BAFTA. During 2025/26 we're once again working with Marquee TV to broadcast selected live concerts to enjoy at home.

Our conductors

Our Principal Conductors have included some of the greatest historic names like Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2021 Edward Gardner became our 13th Principal Conductor, and Vladimir Jurowski became Conductor Emeritus. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor, and Sir George Benjamin our Composer-in-Residence.

Next generations

We're committed to nurturing the next generation of musicians and music-lovers: we love seeing the joy of children and families experiencing their first musical moments, and we're passionate about inspiring schools and teachers through dedicated concerts, workshops, resources and training. Reflecting our values of

Pieter Schoeman

Leader

collaboration and inclusivity, our OrchLab and Open Sound Ensemble projects offer music-making opportunities for adults and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Today's young instrumentalists are the orchestra members of the future, and we have a number of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme leads the way in creating pathways into the profession for young artists from under-represented communities, and our LPO Young Composers and Foyle Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. We also recently launched the LPO Conducting Fellowship, supporting the development of outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2025/26 season

This season's theme, *Harmony with Nature*, explores humanity's bond with the natural world through works by Beethoven, Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Elgar and Dvořák; masterpieces of an era that saw nature as a mirror of human emotion. Closer to our own time, we'll hear from composers as diverse as Duke Ellington, John Luther Adams and Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, who have all found a source of creative energy in the processes of nature.

Highlights with Principal Conductor Edward Gardner include symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Brahms and Rachmaninov; a pair of concerts spotlighting 20th-century Central European composers; an evening dedicated to Elgar; and a performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* to end the season. We'll also welcome back Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as guest conductors including Robin Ticciati, Kirill Karabits, Mark Elder and Kahchun Wong. Our lineup of soloists this season includes violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Alina Ibragimova, James Ehnes and Hiromi; cellist Nicolas Altstaedt; and pianists Yefim Bronfman, Alexandre Kantorow and Tomoko Mukaiyama. The season features nine world and UK premieres, including Tan Dun's choral 'Ode to Peace' *Nine*, and *A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)* by jazz icon Terence Blanchard.

This season also sees tours to South Korea and across Europe, as well as a wide range of performances and community events in our Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden residencies.



© Benjamin Ealovega

Pieter Schoeman was appointed Leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2008, having previously been Co-Leader since 2002. He is also a Professor of Violin at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance.

Pieter has performed worldwide as a soloist and recitalist in such famous halls as the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Moscow's Rachmaninoff Hall, Capella Hall in St Petersburg, Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, and the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. He has also appeared as Guest Leader with many prestigious orchestras across the world. As a chamber musician, he regularly appears at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall. His chamber music partners have included Anne-Sophie Mutter, Veronika Eberle, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Boris Gavlitsky, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Martin Helmchen and Julia Fischer.

Pieter has performed numerous times as a soloist with the LPO. Highlights have included an appearance as both conductor and soloist in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the Brahms Double Concerto with Kristina Blaumane, Florence Price's Violin Concerto No. 2, and the Britten Double Concerto with Alexander Zemtsov, which was released on the LPO Label to great critical acclaim.

Pieter's chair in the LPO is generously supported by Neil Westreich.

New video series: 'Humans of the Orchestra'

Scan the QR code to watch our interview with Pieter



On stage tonight

First Violins

Pieter Schoeman* Leader
Chair supported by Neil Westreich
Vesselin Gellev Sub-Leader
Lasma Taimina
Chair supported by Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave
Martin Höhmann
Katalin Varnagy
Yang Zhang
Wing Yan Alison Kwok
Nilufar Alimaksumova
Amanda Smith
Alison Strange
Daniel Pukach
Beatriz Carbonell
Alice Apreda Howell
Jamie Hutchinson
Eve Kennedy
Tayfun Bomboz

Second Violins

Emma Oldfield Principal
Claudia Tarrant-Matthews
Coco Inman
Marie-Anne Mairesse
Nynke Hijkema
Ashley Stevens
Joseph Maher
Sophie Phillips
Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra
Nancy Elan
Eriko Nagayama
Sioni Williams
Vera Beumer
Kate Cole
Sheila Law

Violas

Nathan Braude
Guest Principal
Laura Vallejo
Katharine Leek
Benedetto Pollani
Kate De Campos
Pamela Ferriman
Jisu Song
Linda Kidwell
Jill Valentine
Mark Gibbs
Charles Cross
Abby Bowen

Cellos

Henry Shapard Principal
David Lale
Francis Bucknall
Leo Melvin
Tom Roff
Helen Thomas
Laura Donoghue
Colin Alexander
Hee Yeon Cho
Pedro Silva

Double Basses

Kevin Rundell* Principal
Hugh Kluger
George Peniston
Tom Walley
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton
Charlotte Kerbegian
Adam Wynter
Elen Roberts
Ben Havinden-Williams

Flutes

Juliette Bausor Principal
Chair supported by Malcolm & Alison Thwaites
Daniel Shao
Stewart McIlwham*
Katherine Bicknell

Piccolos

Stewart McIlwham* Principal
Katherine Bicknell
Juliette Bausor
Daniel Shao

Alto Flute

Stewart McIlwham*

Oboes

John Roberts Guest Principal
Alice Munday
Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley
Sue Böhling*
Jack Tostevin-Hall

Cor Anglais

Sue Böhling* Principal
Chair supported by Dr Barry Grimaldi

Clarinets

Benjamin Mellefont* Principal
Chair supported by Sir Nigel Boardman & Prof. Lynda Gratton
Thomas Watmough
Chair supported by Roger Greenwood
Paul Richards*
James Maltby

Bass Clarinets

Paul Richards* Principal
James Maltby

Bassoons

Richard Ion Guest Principal
Helen Storey*
Simon Estell*
Emma Harding

Contrabassoon

Simon Estell* Principal

Horns

Annemarie Federle Principal
Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE
John Ryan* Principal
Martin Hobbs
Mark Vines Co-Principal
Gareth Mollison
Duncan Fuller
Elise Campbell
Oliver Johnson
Finlay Bain

Trumpets

Paul Beniston* Principal
Chair supported by the Williams family in memory of Grenville Williams
Tom Nielsen* Principal

Anne McAneney*

David Hilton

Tom Watts

Piccolo Trumpet

Tom Nielsen*

Bass Trumpet

David Whitehouse

Trombones

Mark Templeton* Principal
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton
David Whitehouse

Bass Trombone

Lyndon Meredith Principal

Tuba

Lee Tsarmaklis* Principal
Chair supported by William & Alex de Winton

Timpani

Simon Carrington* Principal
Chair supported by Victoria Robey CBE

Percussion

Andrew Barclay* Principal
Chair supported by Gill & Garf Collins
Karen Hutt Co-Principal
Chair supported by Joe Topley & Tracey Countryman
Oliver Yates
Jeremy Cornes
Feargus Brennan

Harps

Céline Saout Guest Principal
Tomos Xerri

Piano/Organ/

Keyed Glockenspiel
Clíodna Shanahan

Celeste

Catherine Edwards
Clíodna Shanahan

*Professor at a London conservatoire

The LPO also acknowledges the following chair supporters whose players are not present at this concert:

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The Candide Trust
Dr Alex & Maria Chan
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Sir Simon Robey
Bianca & Stuart Roden
Ryze Power
Eric Tomsett

London Philharmonic Orchestra

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Sir George Benjamin CBE

conductor & LPO Composer-in-Residence



© Åsa Westerlund

British composer Sir George Benjamin took up the role of Composer-in-Residence at the London Philharmonic Orchestra in September 2025. The LPO 2025/26 season launched on 27 September at the Royal Festival Hall with an acclaimed performance of his orchestral work *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*.

During his time with the LPO, George will participate in rehearsals and performances of his music. He will also serve as mentor to the five participants selected each year for the LPO Young Composers programme. Each spends a season with the Orchestra, creating a new work to be premiered by LPO and Foyle Future First musicians at the annual 'Debut Sounds' concert, this year taking place on 15 July at the Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall.

One of the leading figures in contemporary classical music, George Benjamin was born in 1960 and studied with Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire and with Alexander Goehr at King's College, Cambridge. His early work *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* was performed at the 1980 BBC Proms when he was just 20, marking the start of a remarkable career. His works have been performed by notable conductors and orchestras worldwide, and his groundbreaking opera collaborations with playwright Martin Crimp have created the modern classics *Into the Little Hill*, *Written on Skin*, and *Lessons in Love and Violence*.

His most recent opera, *Picture a day like this*, was premiered at the 2023 Aix-en-Provence Festival, and its Nimbus Records recording by the Mahler Chamber Orchestra under the composer's baton was winner of the Contemporary Award at the 2025 Gramophone Awards.

As a conductor, Benjamin has a broad repertoire, and has been responsible for numerous premieres including works by Wolfgang Rihm, Unsuk Chin, Tristan Murail, Gérard Grisey and György Ligeti. In June 2025, he performed the world premiere of his own new work for piano four hands, *Divisions*, at the Boulez Saal in Berlin with his great friend Pierre-Laurent Aimard. During the 2025/26 season they will repeat the work in London, Washington DC and New York. They will also collaborate with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Munich.

The Henry Purcell Professor of Composition at King's College London since 2001, George Benjamin has received numerous international awards, including a knighthood in 2017 and the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize in 2023.

George Benjamin on tonight's programme

'My hope is that this will prove to be an unusual and stimulating programme. The opening and closing works – Scriabin and Ravel – revel in the luxuriant glory of orchestral sound. The Stravinsky, however, has a different approach, concentrating on primary colours, focused economy and transparency: elements which, up to a point, are relevant to my own score. The Scriabin, Ravel and Stravinsky all, in their contrasting ways, conclude in an idealised and luminous C major – powerful statements of vision from the early decades of the 20th century.'

Video

Watch the full conversation with George, in which he discusses tonight's works and his LPO role. Scan the QR code to watch.



Interview: George Benjamin

Ahead of tonight's concert, we sat down with our new Composer-in-Residence to chat about creativity, collaboration, and what lies ahead this season.

Welcome to the LPO, George! You've been a leading voice in contemporary music for decades, and many audiences will know your work through your operas like *Written on Skin* and *Lessons in Love and Violence*. For those discovering your music for the first time this season, how would you describe your soundworld?

It matters a lot to me that each individual piece I write – regardless of scale – does establish and inhabit its own soundworld, but beyond that, it's difficult to say. My work has changed over the years, and I always allow my instinct and imagination to lead me – above all, I write the music I want to hear.

The LPO season opened in September with your work *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*. How did it feel to hear that piece performed by the LPO and Edward Gardner at the Royal Festival Hall?

This was my first orchestral piece, completed around the time of my 20th birthday, and it's dedicated to my beloved teacher, Olivier Messiaen. It was also the piece that launched my name onto the classical music scene so, even though my idiom has changed considerably over the intervening decades, it remains a special work for me – and it was thrilling to hear it conducted with such mastery and played so beautifully.



On stage with the LPO and Edward Gardner at the Royal Festival Hall on 27 September 2025, following their performance of *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*

As part of your role, you're also serving as Composer Mentor to the LPO Young Composers. What do you enjoy most about working with emerging composers?

Having taught composition at King's College London for a quarter of a century, I've had a lot of contact with younger composers, and this is something I relish. In particular, it's wonderful to be of use – even in a modest way – to a young artist's development and see them flourish creatively. Previous students of mine have benefitted, in a pretty spectacular way, from the LPO's scheme, and I now greatly look forward to being directly involved myself in the years ahead.

The brief you've set for this year's Young Composers invites them to take inspiration from the work of the pioneering sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. What inspired you to choose Brâncuși, and what qualities in his art do you hope will spark ideas for the composers?

Rather than choosing an abstract theme, I looked at important artistic anniversaries in 2026, and came across the fact that Brâncuși was born 150 years ago. I thought he might be a good springboard for the composers' imaginations as his work is so very striking and original; it tackles universal themes in a daringly economic and direct way, and I felt this attribute might cross the divide between musical thought and the rest of the world. His titles are also resonant and memorable, and I felt they alone could inspire even if the sculptural work itself doesn't.

When you yourself are composing, or perhaps taking a breather from work, where do you find renewal or inspiration – in art, literature, nature, or elsewhere?

In anything which, by surprise, fires me and provokes my imagination – though one can never know, in advance, what the next source of inspiration will be. Usually the stuff of music itself – pitch, rhythm, line, phrase and structure – is the central source of ideas and the bedrock of fresh invention, though I've also found that collaboration with Martin Crimp – who wrote the texts for my four operas – has perhaps provided the greatest creative stimulus of all. But anything can provoke musical ideas – and it's true, I read voluminously while composing, I love the visual arts and cinema, and take both solace and stimulation from the majesty and beauty of nature.

Programme notes

Alexander Scriabin

1872–1915

Symphony No. 4, Op. 54 (The Poem of Ecstasy)

1905–08



Courtesy of the Royal College of Music, London

The music of Alexander Scriabin embodies the extraordinary transformation of *fin-de-siècle* culture. The Scriabin of the early 1890s, his music bathed in the sweeping richness of late-Romanticism, is a far cry from the 'mystical' Scriabin of his later years, where texture and colour take precedence over traditional structural landmarks. In his early works we hear the influence of Chopin, Liszt and even Tchaikovsky. But by the early years of the 20th century, his music combines flickers of hazy Debussian impressionism with the bright, bare shards of Stravinsky's most unforgiving orchestral scores. It is music that is at once both sensual and coarse, governed by a mystical personal agenda that saw Scriabin write words as copiously as he did music, much of it tethered to the idea of embracing a greater cosmic world fuelled by 'oceans of love'.

In the case of *The Poem of Ecstasy*, Scriabin saw fit to publish a grand ten-page poem alongside the score, which follows the path of the spirit as it ascends into a state of consciousness, ending with the lines 'I am a moment illuminating eternity. I am affirmation. I am ecstasy.' These vast philosophical ideas would form the basis of his single-movement musical symphonic poem, their scope too grand and expansive to be confined by the traditional multi-movement form of the symphony. Paradoxically, however, Scriabin's far-reaching ideas are contrasted in the score by the fragmented pieces that make up his musical material. This is a kaleidoscopic design, one created from hundreds of intricate, pointillist details that together form a wide, glittering canvas.

As the poem opens, we hear the beginnings of a pregnant flute theme, its languorous contours winding above shimmering strings in near direct homage to Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. But where Debussy's score ebbs and flows in clear pictorial evocation, Scriabin's flute theme ends as quickly as it began, the mantle passed first to the violin, then

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piccolo, then trumpet, then clarinet ... Each melodic fragment cascades into the next, any tangible sense of melody, pulse or tonal centre obscured by the perpetual changes in colour and texture.

When the tone changes abruptly, the strings and winds dance around each other with a scurrying energy reminiscent of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, but this idea, too, disappears no sooner than it has arrived and Scriabin swings back to the deep swathes of strings that characterised the opening. If it is not immediately evident, Scriabin's score eventually reveals itself as

teleological – shaped by a clear sense of purpose and direction, with these two competing ideas – stillness and drive, languor and liberation – becoming emblems of the process that is the emerging of consciousness. As the work progresses, a sense of drive and insistence takes over, the fragments increasingly cohesive, the rhythms energised, dynamics boldened, harmonies deepened. And the trumpet, which at the beginning voiced just a flicker of an idea, eventually proclaims 'victory' (as Scriabin called it): consciousness obtained, ecstasy found.

Programme note © Jo Kirkbride

George Benjamin
LPO Composer-in-Residence | born 1960

Palimpsests
2000–02

Palimpsest I
Palimpsest II

Palimpsest: a manuscript on which two or more texts have been written successively, the original surviving only in fragments. The term can also be applied to natural landscapes, even cityscapes, where the visible form is the result of accretion through the ages. I came across my first palimpsest in a book about medieval music, and was fascinated by the concept of a piece of parchment, or slate, used over and over again for different pieces of music. These were rare materials, and sketches had to be repeatedly overwritten with new invention.

When we come to look at these manuscripts now, 600 or more years later, we see an extraordinary confusion of writing. Its apparent complexity resembles organic growth on the surface, but the number of straight lines

betrays its man-made provenance. If one deciphers this mysterious agglomeration, you can discern the different layers superimposed over each other, and trace right back to the initial text. It was this idea that inspired my pieces.

Palimpsest I starts with a gentle polyphonic song on three clarinets; the harmonic rules that it follows are highly idiosyncratic, but it's very simple and transparent. Within a minute this song becomes virtually imperceptible, but it's always there, below the surface of the music. Above it runs a sequence of widely diverging moods and textures; however, all the material is related to the original song. It's almost like a chaotic variation structure. I wanted the music to sound absolutely crisp and clear: every material has its

Programme notes

own shape, form and timbre. This is emphasised by the unusual orchestration, for eight solo high strings (no cellos) and a massive eight double basses, surrounding a big brass section. The wind section compromises four flutes, four clarinets and a contrabassoon, and there is a little percussion, harps and a piano. My aim was to achieve something akin to dusk or dawn in the desert, or at high altitude in winter, when the sun is very low and the light almost horizontal, and crystal clear. *Palimpsest I* was written as a 75th birthday tribute to Pierre Boulez, who conducted the world premiere at London's Barbican Hall with the London Symphony Orchestra in February 2000.

A short break follows its quiet conclusion; then *Palimpsest II* commences. Despite its slower tempo, greater length and darker tone-colour, this piece shares much with its predecessor. The most important structural signposts in *Palimpsest I* are provided by the varied return of the opening clarinet song, expanded

in harmony and inflated in scale at each appearance. A different, split texture plays a similar role in *Palimpsest II*: abrupt brassy chords (doubled by 'conga' drums plotted against cool, suspended polyphony in piccolos or high strings. Each time, between appearances of this texture, the music evolves in strongly divergent directions, eventually reaching a fierce and plangent *tutti* entirely in the bass register. Out of this, features of *Palimpsest I* – some of which have been present subliminally throughout – begin to break to the surface. As the music propels itself towards a surprise conclusion, elements from both *Palimpsests* collide and combine.

The first complete performance of *Palimpsests* was given on 5 October 2002, again by the London Symphony Orchestra under Pierre Boulez at London's Barbican Hall.

Programme note © George Benjamin

Interval – 20 minutes

An announcement will be made five minutes before the end of the interval.

The Nature Dialogues

Fascinating free pre-concert talks exploring our season theme, *Harmony with Nature*

Book free tickets online at lpo.org.uk

Saturday 21 March 2026, 5pm

Harmony with our Rivers

With extreme angler, author & broadcaster Jeremy Wade



Wednesday 8 April 2026, 6pm

Harmony with our Fragile Earth

With scientist Johan Rockström, environmentalist Tony Juniper & composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir



Friday 17 April 2026, 6pm

Harmony with our Changing Planet

With social scientist Gail Whiteman



Programme notes

Igor Stravinsky
1882–1971

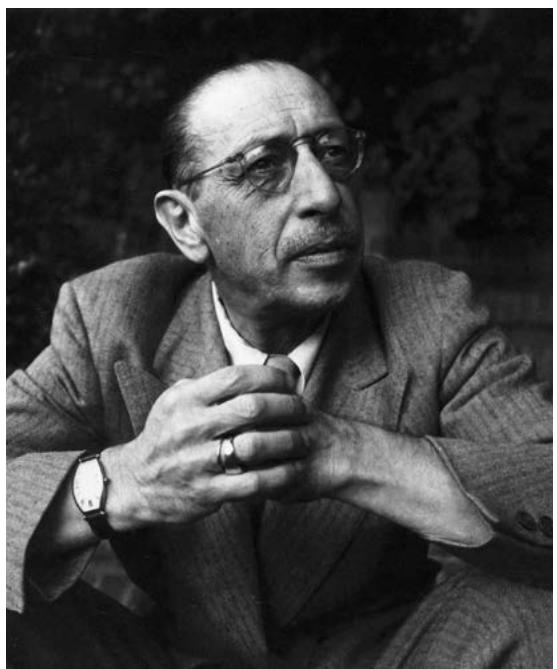
Symphonies of Wind Instruments 1920, rev. 1947

Stravinsky described his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, for orchestral woodwind and brass sections, as 'an austere ritual that is unfolded in terms of short litanies between different groups of homogeneous instruments'. The starting point for its composition was the death of his friend and fellow composer Claude Debussy in 1918. The first part of the work to appear in print was the closing chorale, arranged for piano: this was published in December 1920, in a special edition of the magazine *La Revue Musicale* called 'Tombeau de Claude Debussy'. But by the time this appeared, Stravinsky had already finished the complete work, and it was first performed in London the following summer under Serge Koussevitzky. Stravinsky substantially revised and re-scored the work in 1947, and although the original version remains available, the more hard-edged revision is usually preferred.

The title of 'symphonies' does not refer to traditional symphonic procedures, but is used in its older sense of 'sounding together'. The work is constructed in a series of short, intercut segments in different tempi and colours – a highly original procedure in 1920, which may have owed something to the then-new art of cinema, and which had a profound influence on many 20th-century composers. There are three related tempi, Tempo II half as fast again as Tempo I, Tempo III twice as fast. But Tempo I has two different aspects: with a changing quaver beat, it is associated with an incisive bell-like figure dominated by high clarinets; with a more regular crotchet pulse, it is associated with slow-moving chord progressions for the full ensemble. Tempo II brings a series of winding, Russian-sounding melodies (reminiscent of *The Rite of Spring*) for small groups of woodwind, punctuated by more energetic outbursts. Tempo III does not appear until about halfway through the piece, and is used chiefly in two episodes in changing metres – the first reminiscent of the orgiastic dances of *The Rite*, the second lighter on its feet. Meanwhile the slow-crotchet version of

Tempo I seems to have been forgotten, except in two short interjections of brass chords; but these prove to be anticipations of the memorial chorale, which is stated at full length to bring the work to a solemn end.

Programme note © Anthony Burton

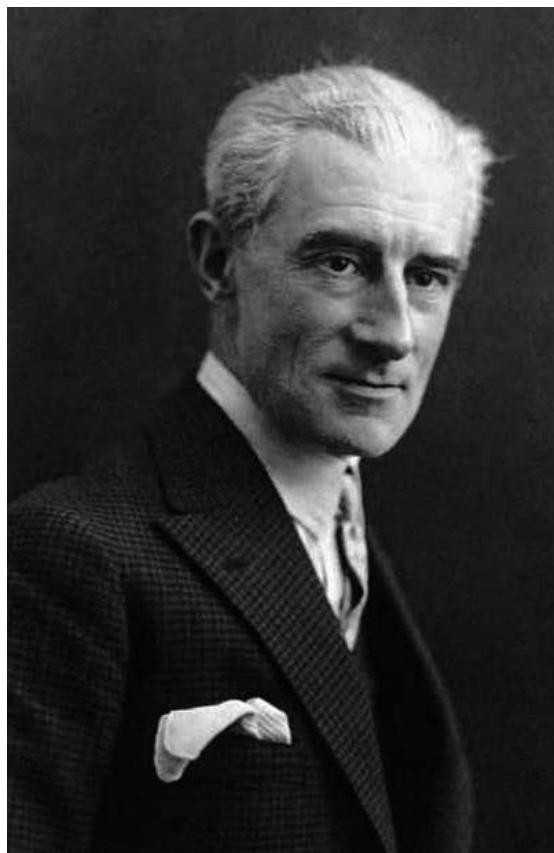


Programme notes

Maurice Ravel
1875–1937

Ma mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)
1908–10, orch. 1911

*Prélude – Danse du Rouet et Scène – Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant –
Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête – Petit Poucet –
Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes – Le jardin féerique*



‘Ravel was my favourite [among my father’s friends] because he used to tell me marvellous stories. I would sit on his knee and indefatigably he would begin “Once upon a time ...”.

Mimie Godebski’s adult recollections revealing lifelong bachelor Ravel’s unerring affinity with children and childish things relate directly to the conception of the suite *Ma mère l’Oye* (‘Mother Goose’). In the summer of 1908, the composer had presented the nine-year-old Mimie and her younger brother Jean with a tiny but exquisite ‘Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant’ (‘Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty’) for piano duet. His intention was that they would play it, but it proved too difficult, and when the death of his father took the composer back to Paris that autumn, any intended further work was temporarily halted; it was not until the spring of 1910 – the same time that he was working on the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* – that Ravel completed it as a five-movement suite on subjects borrowed from old fairytales by the Comtesse d’Aulnoy, Marie Leprince de Beaumont and Charles Perrault (whose collection *Contes de ma mère l’Oye* provided the title). He still harboured hopes that the Godebski children would give the first public performance, but although they played it to him in private, the premiere was eventually given in Paris by two other child pianists, Jeanne Leleu and Geneviève Durony.

Ravel produced his customary orchestration in 1911, but then, in answer to a commission from a Parisian theatre, followed it up with the expanded ballet score (nearly twice the length of the suite) that we hear tonight.

Programme notes

The scenario featured the famous Beauty pricking her finger, dreaming fairytale stories as she sleeps and finally being awoken at dawn by Prince Charming, and was presumably grafted on afterwards since it entailed not only the addition of linking passages, an atmospheric 'Prélude' and a 'Danse du Rouet' ('Spinning-Wheel Dance') but also a slight reordering of the original movements. These themselves remain intact, however, their naive charm and sensitivity somehow only heightened by the deft sophistication of Ravel's orchestration. After the 'Pavane' comes the Satie-esque 'Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête' ('Dialogues of Beauty and the Beast'), with Beauty represented by a clarinet, the Beast by a contrabassoon, and their moment of reconciliation by a harp *glissando* and glistening violin harmonics. 'Petit Poucet' depicts a diminutive character (his English equivalent would be 'Hop o' my Thumb') laying a trail of breadcrumbs through the woods, only to see his waymarkers eaten by birds; the trail can be heard meandering its way through the music on the strings, and the birds are unmistakable. 'Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes' ('Little ugly one, Empress of the Pagodas') conjures its oriental flavour through the use of the pentatonic scale

– like Debussy and others, Ravel had been influenced by hearing a Javanese gamelan at the Paris Exhibition of 1889 – and the score ends with 'Le jardin féerique' ('The fairy garden'), depicting Prince Charming's arrival in the ballet, but in its original guise surely a burst of radiant nostalgia for childhood.

Programme note © Lindsay Kemp

We'd love to hear from you

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Tonight's music on the LPO Label: Stravinsky with Vladimir Jurowski



Petrushka Symphonies of Wind Instruments Orpheus

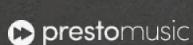
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Karina Canellakis

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Anne-Sophie Mutter

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Royal Festival Hall

Sibelius Pohjola's Daughter
Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto
Beethoven Symphony No. 7

Karina Canellakis conductor
Anne-Sophie Mutter violin

Concert generously supported by Sir Simon & Lady Robey CBE

Tchaikovsky & Sibelius

Wed 4 Mar 2026, 7.30pm
Royal Festival Hall

Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2
Sibelius Symphony No. 2

Paavo Järvi conductor
Alexandre Kantorow piano

Four Seasons of Buenos Aires

Sat 21 Mar 2026, 6.30pm
Queen Elizabeth Hall
Please note time & venue

John Luther Adams Become River
Clarice Assad Terra: Concerto for
Bassoon and Orchestra (European
premiere)

Piazzolla The Four Seasons of
Buenos Aires (with live dance)

Pablo Rus Broseta conductor
Jonathan Davies bassoon*
Alice Ivy-Pemberton violin
Lauren Oakley tango dancer
Kai Widdrington tango dancer

Plus post-concert 'After Dark'
performance with tonight's tango
dancers – see page 2.

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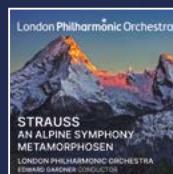
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Partner

We're virtuosos of creative collaboration, expertly crafting bespoke partnerships that hit the right notes. We tailor each bespoke partnership to your strategic business objectives, combining exceptional experiences that deepen client relationships, forge new connections, elevate your brand, and create buzzworthy content that leaves audiences captivated by a compelling brand story.

We're also passionate about using music and our work to increase social value. By partnering together across a shared purpose and values, we can leave a positive, lasting impact on the communities we engage, deepening your CSR and SDG commitments.

Find out how you can support at
[lpo.org.uk/support us](https://lpo.org.uk/support-us)



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