2026/27 season at the Southbank Centre

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Free concert programme

The power of listening



SOUTHBANK CENTRE 75

RESIDENT

The power of listening

What happens when we really listen? This season we're exploring the extraordinary ways that listening can inspire creativity, connection and new perspectives.

To begin our journey, we asked eight Royal College of Art students to listen to a piece of music featured in our London season, from Stravinsky's *The Firebird* to Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. From there, the artists unleashed their imagination, each creating an original artwork based on their personal response to the music.

You can see how varied their visual interpretations of the music were from the artworks on this page and on the programme cover.

If you haven't had the chance to see the artworks on billboards around London, you can view them all in detail on our website. You can also find out more about each of the artists and the processes they used, as well as listen to the music that inspired them.

Check out the artworks and the pieces that inspired them:
lpo.org.uk/listening

Artworks designed by (clockwise from top left) Megan Peng, Zengyue Zhao, CTZ, Yunqi Peng, Anna Korbel, Yejin Seo, Ishita Sharma, Ruwani Rajapakse



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 Queen Elizabeth Hall
Wednesday 25 November 2026 | 7.30pm

Lessons in Love and Violence

Music by George Benjamin
Text by Martin Crimp

Edward Gardner conductor
Generously supported by Aud Jebsen
Dan Ayling director
Nathaniel Sullivan King
John Brancy* Gaveston/Stranger
Georgia Jarman Isabel
Toby Spence Mortimer
James Way Boy/Young King
Hannah Sawle Witness 1/Singer 1/Woman 1
Joanne Evans Witness 2/Singer 2/Woman 2
Andri Björn Róbertsson Witness 3/Madman

**Please note change of artist from previously advertised.*

There is no interval in this performance. Approximate end time: 9.05pm.

Performed by arrangement with Faber Music, London.
Co-commissioned by Royal Ballet and Opera, Covent Garden; Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam; Hamburg State Opera; Opéra de Lyon; Lyric Opera of Chicago; Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona; & Teatro Real, Madrid.

Please note the timings shown are given only as a guide.

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Welcome

Welcome to the Southbank Centre

We're the UK's largest centre for the arts, 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

Inside the Music: our new Sky Arts TV series this autumn

Our 2024 Sky Arts TV series, *Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra*, was nominated for a BAFTA, recognising its compelling storytelling and rare behind-the-scenes insight into orchestral life.

Following this success, Sky Arts have commissioned a second series, which began on 10 November and airs weekly each Tuesday at 8pm. *Inside the Music with the London Philharmonic Orchestra* explores five different major orchestral works performed by the LPO, with conductors Edward Gardner, Karina Canellakis and Paavo Järvi guiding viewers through each work. Combining performance footage and insights from musicians, the series reveals how these masterpieces are built.

Inside the Music airs each Tuesday at 8pm until 8 December. Sky Arts is free to view on Freeview channel 36. Sky and NOW Entertainment Members can catch up on demand.

New on the LPO Label: Edward Gardner conducts Bartók

Principal Conductor Edward Gardner's latest recording on the LPO Label is out now. It pairs two ballets at opposite extremes – the menacing swagger of *The Miraculous Mandarin*, which outraged its first audience in 1926, and the folk-song fairytale forest of *The Wooden Prince*, which Ed describes as 'full of sunlit lyricism'.

The album is available to stream wherever you listen to music, or you can buy the CD from the LPO Label store. Turn to page 12 for more details and a link to listen.

Tonight's programme cover

Artwork by Royal College of Art student Yunqi Peng: 'Heavy brass, lighter mind'. Designed while listening to Stravinsky's *The Firebird* (Finale), performed by the LPO under Vladimir Jurowski. **#thepoweroflistening**

Tonight in 2 minutes

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

What to expect

Take your seats...
The players tune up their instruments, then the conductor, Ed, and the singers come on stage. Once the applause dies down, sit back and enjoy the performance. Surtitles will be displayed above the stage to help follow the story as it unfolds.

Lessons in Love and Violence
Music by George Benjamin
Text by Martin Crimp
90 mins, no interval

What happens when desire comes into conflict with social mores, family ties and the needs of the people? *Lessons in Love and Violence* is a gripping modern opera by two leading British artists: George Benjamin, the London Philharmonic Orchestra's current Composer-in-Residence, and playwright Martin Crimp. Benjamin and Crimp have created four operas together, building a reputation for powerful stories told through bold, imaginative music.

First performed at London's Royal Opera House in 2018, *Lessons in Love and Violence* takes us back to 14th-century England. Inspired by the real reign of King Edward II and loosely based on Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*, it reimagines a turbulent period of history as a drama of love, ambition and betrayal. Edward struggles to hold on to his crown while protecting his relationship with Gaveston, the man he loves. His queen, Isabel, is determined to secure the future for herself and her son, setting in motion a chain of events that threatens to destroy both family and kingdom.

This is a story about the personal cost of power, and what happens when private desires collide with public duty. Benjamin's music brings the drama vividly to life, shifting between moments of tenderness and sudden intensity.

We're really pleased that George Benjamin and Martin Crimp are with us in the audience tonight. We're also delighted to welcome a brilliant cast of singers, several of whom are returning to roles they performed in the opera's world premiere here in London and its US premiere at the Tanglewood Festival, Massachusetts.

Want to read more? Turn to page 14 for a deeper dive into the opera.

Who's on stage?



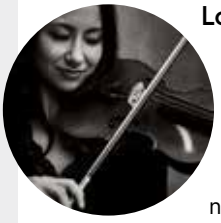
Edward Gardner: conductor

Edward Gardner is our Principal Conductor and works closely with the Orchestra all year round, so our musicians know him well and enjoy a special connection and rapport with him. One of the leading British conductors of his generation, Ed is highly regarded for his work in opera as well as with orchestras. He was previously Music Director of English National Opera, and always brings a strong sense of drama and storytelling to his LPO performances.



Tonight's singers

Tonight there are eight guest singers on stage, playing the characters in the story. At the heart of the drama is **Nathaniel Sullivan** (pictured) as the King, whose relationship with Gaveston, sung by **John Brancy**, threatens his grip on power. **Georgia Jarman** plays Isabel, the Queen determined to protect her son's future, while **Toby Spence** is Mortimer, her powerful ally. **James Way** sings the role of the Boy, who later becomes the Young King. **Hannah Sawle**, **Joanne Evans** and **Andri Björn Róbertsson** take on several other roles, including witnesses to the unfolding events.



London Philharmonic Orchestra

Tonight there are over 70 London Philharmonic Orchestra musicians on stage. Our talented members represent over 14 different nationalities, and many of them enjoy busy solo, chamber and teaching careers alongside their orchestral roles.

Turn to page 6 for tonight's player list.

About us: London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

Uniquely groundbreaking and exhilarating to watch and hear, since 1932 we've been recognised as one of the world's leading orchestras, celebrated for our excellence, versatility, invention and inclusivity. Our mission is to create unrivalled orchestral experiences on stage and cultivate human connections beyond it. We achieve this through our exceptional live performances, pioneering education and community projects, acclaimed recordings, online activity and trailblazing international tours.

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

Life's big 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*.

Connecting worldwide

We're one of the world's most-streamed orchestras, with over 15 million plays of our content each month. We're the most followed UK orchestra on Instagram, the most followed orchestra globally on TikTok, and the third most followed globally across all social platforms. Our 2024 Sky Arts documentary series, *Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra*, was nominated for a 2025 BAFTA, and a second series, *Inside the Music with the LPO*, is currently airing on Tuesday evenings at 8pm on Sky Arts.

Our conductors

Our Principal Conductors have included great 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 in recognition of his impact as Principal Conductor from 2007–21. Karina Canellakis is our current Principal Guest Conductor, and Sir George Benjamin is 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

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 offer a range of opportunities to support their progression. Our LPO Junior Artists programme creates pathways into the profession for young players from under-represented backgrounds, and our LPO Young Composers and Future Firsts schemes support the next generation of professional musicians, bridging the transition from education to professional careers. The LPO Conducting Fellowship supports the development of outstanding early-career conductors from backgrounds under-represented in the profession.

2026/27 season

Our season theme, *In Search of Purpose*, explores the human spirit's resilience and quest for meaning, inspired by Beethoven's triumph over despair and the ways subsequent composers have used music as a vessel to confront life's big questions. Principal Conductor Edward Gardner's concerts include Britten's *War Requiem*, Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, and Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri*. We also welcome back titled conductors Karina Canellakis and Vladimir Jurowski, as well as Chief Conductor & Artistic Advisor Designate Paavo Järvi.

Our lineup of soloists this season includes Alice Sara Ott, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Hilary Hahn, Pekka Kuusisto, Renée Fleming and Mitsuko Uchida, and we join the London Philharmonic Choir in celebrating its 80th anniversary year with Fauré's *Requiem* alongside a choral world premiere by Dame Judith Weir. The season concludes on 24 April with Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, again with the LPC. New music remains a core pillar this season, with further premieres by Mark Simpson, Jacob Mühlrad, Dai Fujikura and Kevin Puts.

The season also sees tours to China, Spain, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and the Canary Islands, as well as performances and community events in our Brighton, Eastbourne and Saffron Walden residencies.

lpo.org.uk

Alice Ivy-Pemberton

Tonight's Leader



Alice Ivy-Pemberton joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra as Co-Leader in February 2023.

Praised by *The New York Times* for her 'sweet-toned playing', Alice has performed as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician to international acclaim. While growing up in New York City and studying with Nurit Pacht, Alice made a nationally televised Carnegie Hall debut aged ten, and was a finalist at the Menuhin International Competition at the age of 12.

Alice earned her Bachelors and Masters degrees at The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Itzhak Perlman and Catherine Cho as a fully-funded recipient of the Kovner Fellowship. During her studies she won Juilliard's Violin Concerto Competition, performed extensively with the New York Philharmonic and The Philadelphia Orchestra, and led orchestras under the baton of Barbara Hannigan, Xian Zhang and Matthias Pintscher. Upon graduating in 2022 she was awarded the Polisi Prize and a Benzaquen Career Advancement Grant in recognition of 'tremendous talent, promise, creativity, and potential to make a significant impact in the performing arts'.

An avid chamber musician, Alice has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Anthony Marwood, Gil Shaham and members of the Belcea, Doric, Juilliard and Brentano string quartets, and performed with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Festival appearances include Music@Menlo, Moritzburg and Yellow Barn. Also a passionate advocate for new music and its social relevance, Alice created *Drowning Monuments*, a noted multimedia project on climate change that brought together five world premieres for solo violin.

On stage tonight

First Violins
Alice Ivy-Pemberton Leader
Chair supported by the Hodson family
Kate Oswin
Chair supported by Eric Tomsett
Lasma Taimina
Chair supported by Irina Gofman & Mr Rodrik V. G. Cave
Minn Majoe
Chair supported by Dr Alex & Maria Chan
Vera Beumer
Cassandra Hamilton
Chair supported by Jenny Watson CBE
Megan Yang
Katalin Varnagy
Yang Zhang
Nilufar Alimaksumova

Second Violins
Tania Mazzetti Principal
Chair supported by The Candide Trust
Emma Oldfield Co-Principal
Marie-Anne Mairesse
Nynke Hijlkema
Ashley Stevens
Fiona Higham
Sophie Phillips
Nancy Elan

Violas
Rebecca Chambers Guest Principal
Alexander McFarlane
Martin Wray
Chair supported by David & Bettina Harden
Laura Vallejo
James Heron
Michelle Bruil
Shiry Rashkovsky
Kate De Campos

Cellos
Kristina Blaumane Principal
Chair supported by Bianca & Stuart Roden
Waynne Kwon
David Lale
Auriol Evans
Heeyeon Cho
Helen Thomas
Iain Ward
Colin Alexander

Double Basses
Kevin Rundell* Principal
Sebastian Pennar* Co-Principal
Laura Murphy
Yijia Cui
Catherine Ricketts
Annabel Beniston

Flutes
Juliette Bausor Principal
Chair supported by Malcolm & Alison Thwaites
Stewart McIlwham*

Piccolos
Stewart McIlwham* Principal
Chair supported by The Thompson Family Charitable Trust
Juliette Bausor

Oboes
Ian Hardwick* Principal
Alice Munday
Chair supported by David & Yi Buckley

Clarinets
Benjamin Mellefont* Principal
Chair supported by Sir Nigel Boardman & Prof. Lynda Gratton
Bethany Crouch

E-flat Clarinets
Thomas Watmough Principal
Chair supported by Roger Greenwood
Benjamin Mellefont*

Bass Clarinet
Paul Richards* Principal

Basset Horn
Bethany Crouch

Bassoons
Paul Boyes Guest Principal
Lorna West
Simon Estell*

Contrabassoon
Simon Estell* Principal

Horns
John Ryan* Principal
Sarah Pennington
Mark Vines Co-Principal
Chair supported by Friends of the Orchestra
Paul Cott

Trumpets/ Piccolo Trumpets
Tom Nielsen* Principal
Anne McAneney*
Chair supported by anonymous donors

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

Bass Trombone
Lyndon Meredith Principal

Contrabass Trombone
Daniel West

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
Chair supported by an anonymous donor
Francesca Lombardelli

Harps
Céline Saout Guest Principal
Tomos Xerri

Celeste
Iain Clarke

Cimbalom
Edward Cervenka

**Professor at a London conservatoire*

Assistant Conductor
Enyi Okpara

Music Staff
Bretton Brown

Deputy Stage Manager
Brad Hamilton

Surtitles
Andrew Kingsmill

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

Anonymous donors
Dr Barry Grimaldi
Hans-Wilhelm & Evelyn Jenckel
Sir Simon Robey
Neil Westreich
The Williams family in memory of Grenville Williams
Louise Worthington

Edward Gardner

Principal Conductor, London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Jason Bell

'A conducting force to be reckoned with' (*The New York Times*), leading British conductor Edward Gardner is now in his sixth season as Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and his third as Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet. He also serves as Honorary Conductor of Norway's Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, after an outstanding nine years as its Chief Conductor.

Highlights to come with the London Philharmonic Orchestra this season include Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* and a world premiere by Judith Weir. Last month, Edward led the Orchestra on tours to China and Spain, with further tours of Germany and the Netherlands to come.

Elsewhere this season, he launches his first complete Wagner *Ring* Cycle with a new production of *Das Rheingold* at the Norwegian Opera; makes his San Diego Symphony and Detroit Symphony debuts; and conducts a new production of Britten's *Death in Venice* at the Bavarian State Opera.

Edward has previously led distinguished orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony, Berlin Radio Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony and Staatskapelle Berlin. He enjoys longstanding relationships with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, where he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which he has conducted at the First and Last Nights of the BBC Proms.

A major figure in the opera world, Edward previously served as Music Director of English National Opera, and has led productions at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Festival, Opéra National de Paris, Bavarian State Opera, and La Scala.

Edward's extensive and wide-ranging discography features multiple Grammy nominees, International Classical Music Award nominees and Gramophone Award winners, including Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra – winner of a 2023 Gramophone Award – and Britten's *Peter Grimes* with the Bergen Philharmonic, named *Gramophone*'s 2021 Recording of the Year.

His latest album on the LPO Label is a pairing of Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin Suite* and *The Wooden Prince*, released last month (LPO-0141: see page 12). Other LPO Label recordings include Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, Piano Concerto and Symphony No. 2; Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*; Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*; Strauss's *An Alpine Symphony* and *Metamorphosen*; and works by Bartók, Rachmaninov, Dvořák, Schumann, Britten, Brett Dean and Tania León. In 2024, he and the Orchestra featured in a BAFTA-nominated Sky Arts TV series: *Backstage with the London Philharmonic Orchestra*, and a second series, *Inside the Music with the LPO*, is currently airing on Tuesday evenings at 8pm on Sky Arts.

The founder of Manchester's Hallé Youth Orchestra, Edward maintains close relationships with The Juilliard School and London's Royal Academy of Music, where he is the inaugural Sir Charles Mackerras Conducting Chair. His accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society's Conductor of the Year Award, an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera, the Sibelius Prize, and an OBE for Services to Music.

Edward Gardner's position with the London Philharmonic Orchestra is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

Dan Ayling
director



Dan Ayling is a British opera and theatre director, based in London. He trained at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and Birkbeck.

Dan has a long-standing working relationship with director Katie Mitchell, having been her associate since 2009. He also works regularly with Sir George Benjamin, having directed revivals of the original productions of *Written on Skin* and *Lessons in Love and Violence*, as well as many concert stagings around the world.

Dan's work as a director includes *The Elixir of Love* (Waterperry Festival); *Gloriana* (St Endellion Festival); *To See The Invisible* (Aldeburgh Festival); *Vast White Stillness/Remember Me* (Spitalfields Festival); *Struileag* (Glasgow Commonwealth Games); *FLOW/Fewer Emergencies/City of Lost Angels* (The Print Room, London); *Christie in Love* (Lion & Unicorn, London); *Can't Stand Up For Falling Down* (Arcola, London); and *The Kiss* (Hampstead Theatre, London).

As a Revival Director, his credits include *Written on Skin* (Amsterdam, Toulouse, Vienna, Munich, Paris, London, Toronto, NYC, Moscow, Berlin); *Lessons in Love and Violence* (Liceu/Hamburg State Opera); *Theodora* (Teatro Real, Madrid); *Zauberland* (Royal Opera House/ New York/Russia); *Miranda* (Bordeaux/Caen); and *Clemency* (Scottish Opera/Edinburgh International Festival).

Future projects include a revival of *Written on Skin* for the Adelaide Festival (2028).

Nathaniel Sullivan
King



© Daniel Welch

An 'alert and highly musical baritone' (*Opera News*), Nathaniel Sullivan infuses his work with 'impressive strength and precision' (*Schmopera*), as well as 'great eloquence' and 'allegiance to both music and words' (*ConcertoNet*).

Nathaniel performed the role of the King in the North American premiere of *Lessons in Love and Violence* at the Tanglewood Music Center in 2022. This is his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Appearances this season include the role of Christus in *St Matthew Passion* with Apollo's Fire on a US tour, and recital appearances with the Brooklyn Art Song Society, Lyric Fest, Concerts on the Slope and the Chamber Music Quad Cities. Recent performance highlights include the role of Jochanaan in *Salome* with Heartbeat Opera and with West Bay Opera; the role of The Mark in the world premiere of *Constance: A Confession* with Experiments in Opera; and solo appearances in Bach's Mass in B minor with Abendmusik, in Ned Rorem's *Evidence of Things Not Seen* with the Brooklyn Art Song Society, and in the premieres of Terre Johnson's *Te Deum* and Marc-André Bougie's *Stabat Mater* at Carnegie Hall.

Nathaniel was one of seven winners of the 2023 Astral Artists National Competition and has been awarded the Grace B. Jackson Prize for exceptional service at Tanglewood (2019); Third Place in the Washington International Competition (2023), the Lyndon Woodside Oratorio Solo Competition (2019), and the Orpheus Vocal Competition (2019); and First Place in the NATS National Musical Theatre Competition (2018).

John Brancy

Gaveston/Stranger



John Brancy is a versatile baritone whose success in the world premiere of Sir George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's *Picture a day like this* at the 2023 Aix-en-Provence Festival drew universal praise and attention. Equally at home in established and contemporary repertoire, he brings dramatic insight and vocal flexibility to a wide range of roles.

This is John's London Philharmonic Orchestra debut. This season, he also makes his debut at the Grand Théâtre de Genève as Valens in Krzysztof Warlikowski's new production of *Theodora*, conducted by Raphaël Pichon leading Pygmalion, and sings the title role in a new production of *Eugene Onegin* for Opera North. He makes his debut at the Gran Teatre del Liceu as Julio in Calixto Bieito's production of Thomas Adès's *The Exterminating Angel*, conducted by the composer; joins the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra for concert performances of Benjamin's *Picture a day like this* under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle; and makes his debut with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra in *Carmina Burana* under Dalia Stasevska.

Recent highlights include his return to Aix-en-Provence in the title role of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* in the late Pierre Audi's production, conducted by Leonardo García Alarcón, as well as his Bavarian State Opera debut in Weinberg's *Lady Magnesia* and his role debut as Count Almaviva in a new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* at Opéra national du Rhin.

Georgia Jarman

Isabel



© Aaron Skyler

Acclaimed for her vocal flexibility, dramatic instinct and refined musicianship, Grammy-nominated American soprano Georgia Jarman has built an international career spanning lyric, *bel canto* and contemporary repertoire on leading opera and concert stages.

Tonight is her debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Other 2026/27 season highlights include her debut with the German Radio Philharmonic Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern as Agnès in George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's *Written on Skin* conducted by the composer, as well as a concert with The Belvedere Series in collaboration with the Jasper Quartet. Future engagements include a debut with the Adelaide Festival.

Particularly admired as an interpreter of contemporary opera, Georgia recently made her debut at the Finnish National Opera as Mette in Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Festen*. She has collaborated closely with composer George Benjamin, performing *Written on Skin* (Agnès) and *Lessons in Love and Violence* (Isabel) in productions and concerts across Europe and Asia. These have included appearances at the Venice Biennale Musica, Hamburg State Opera, Opéra National de Lyon and Gran Teatre del Liceu, as well as performances at the Elbphilharmonie, Philharmonie de Paris and Holland Festival, and with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Orchestre de Paris under the composer's direction.

Toby Spence
Mortimer



Awarded Singer of the Year by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2012, Toby Spence's career has taken him to major companies throughout the UK, including London's Royal Ballet & Opera, English National Opera, Garsington Opera, Glyndebourne, Opera North and Scottish Opera.

Toby is a regular guest of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2021 he sang the role of Jack in Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* with the Orchestra under Edward Gardner at the Royal Festival Hall, later released on the LPO Label and winner of a Gramophone Award.

International engagements have taken Toby to the MusikTheater an de Wien, Dutch National Opera, Opéra national de Paris, Berlin, Hamburg and Bavarian State Operas, Teatro La Fenice, Teatro Real Madrid, Geneva Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, New York's Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera and Santa Fe Opera. Festival engagements have included Aldeburgh, the BBC Proms, Edinburgh, Aix-en-Provence and Salzburg.

A prolific recording artist, Toby appears regularly in concert. Current engagements include Alwa in Berg's *Lulu* with the Gürzenich-Orchester Köln; Captain Vere in Britten's *Billy Budd* at The Grange Festival and the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires; Gustav von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* for OperaLombardia; Act 3 of *Parsifal* with the Oslo Philharmonic; Evangelist in *St Matthew Passion* for The Bach Choir, the Dunedin Consort and at Calouste Gulbenkian; Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra; Handel's *Messiah* with Huddersfield Choral Society; Mozart's *Requiem* with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Transylvanian Philharmonic Orchestra; and Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* with the Ulster Orchestra.

James Way
Boy/Young King



© Raphael Neal

Tenor James Way is fast gaining international recognition for the versatility of his voice and his commanding stage presence. He is in demand as a soloist for period-ensemble conductors including William Christie, René Jacobs, Harry Bicket and Trevor Pinnock, but is equally comfortable in later repertoire. His debut recording, of Britten's *Canticles* on Delphian Records, was nominated for a 2026 Gramophone Award.

Tonight is James's concert debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He has appeared in several productions at Glyndebourne Festival Opera with the Orchestra, including the role of Flute in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* under Dalia Stasevska, and The Son in Poulenc's *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* under Robin Ticciati. Other recent performances include tonight's role – the Young King in George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's *Lessons in Love and Violence* – with the Orchestre de Paris, as well as Sellem in *The Rake's Progress* with the Munich Philharmonic and Barbara Hannigan, Holy Fool in *Boris Godunov* with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Jakub Hrůša, and a return to the BBC Proms in Lili Boulanger's *Vielle prière bouddhique* with BBCNOW under Ryan Bancroft. Performances of various Handel roles continue to take him around the world, with performances at Carnegie Hall, Tokyo Opera City, the Barbican and the Paris Philharmonie, among others.

This season's highlights include Mozart's *Requiem* with the Residentie Orkest under Richard Egarr, George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's *Written on Skin* with the German Radio Philharmonic, and the title role in *Orpheus* with Opera North under Jasdeep Singh Degun and Ashok Gupta.

Hannah Sawle

Witness 1/Singer 1/Woman 1



Hannah Sawle studied at Chetham's School of Music, the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and on English National Opera's Opera Works course. While at the Guildhall, she won awards for her English and contemporary song, and she has been a guest soloist on BBC World Service, Radio 3 and Radio 4. Her solo recordings include Giles Swayne's *Four Passiontide Motets* with the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and Respighi's *La pentola magica* with the BBC Philharmonic.

Hannah has performed tonight's role in *Lessons in Love and Violence* for the Opéra National de Lyon, Hamburg State Opera and Orchestre de Paris, and on tour with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. Other roles include Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* for Dorset Opera and Iford Arts/Charles Court Opera, Diana in *Orpheus in the Underworld* for Opera Danube, Papagena in *The Magic Flute* for English Touring Opera, Gianetta in *L'elisir d'amore* and Lady Dunmow in Berkeley's *A Dinner Engagement* for Wexford Festival Opera, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* for Westminster Opera, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* for Jackdaws Music Education Trust, and Nedda in *Pagliacci* and Mademoiselle Silberklang in *The Impresario* for Garden Opera. In concert, she has sung Strauss Lieder and Mahler's Symphony No. 4 with the Bristol Metropolitan Orchestra at St George's Bristol.

Other notable engagements include the title role of *Lakme* with Swansea City Opera; Queen of the Night (cover) in *The Magic Flute* for English National Opera; and Ismene (cover) in *Mitridate, re di Ponto,* Witness 1/ Singer 1/Woman 1 (cover) in *Lessons in Love and Violence*, and Morgana in *Alcina* (cover), all for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Joanne Evans

Witness 2/Singer 2/Woman 2



London-born mezzo-soprano Joanne Evans is a graduate of the 2023 Merola Opera Program and the 2024 Académie of the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, where she was awarded Le Prix des Amis for Voice.

As well as tonight's London Philharmonic Orchestra debut, the 2026/27 season showcases Joanne in an exciting set of engagements, including a leading role in a new production of George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's *Into the Little Hill* at the Opéra Comique in Paris, and the role of Dodo McNeill in the UK premiere of Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's critically acclaimed *Breaking the Waves* with English National Opera. She also joins the Charlotte Symphony for performances of Handel's *Messiah*.

The 2025/26 season featured a performance of *Into the Little Hill* with Ensemble intercontemporain at the Tokyo Spring Festival, as well as two main-stage appearances with Opera San José as Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* and Flora in *La traviata*. She also returned to the Ravinia Steans Music Institute, in partnership with the Ear Taxi Festival, to present a concert of newly commissioned vocal music.

In summer 2024, Joanne was a Fellow at the Ravinia Steans Music Institute, after which she joined the Britten Pears Young Artist Programme in Aldburgh. She then attended the *bel canto* Voice Academy at Fondation des Treilles, and performed the role of Flora in *La traviata* with Annapolis Opera.

Andri Björn Róbertsson

Witness 3/Madman



© Sigga Ella

Icelandic bass-baritone Andri Björn Róbertsson studied at the Reykjavík Academy of Singing and Vocal Arts, the Royal Academy of Music, and the National Opera Studio. A former member of Opernhaus Zürich's IOS and ENO's Harewood Artists, he is also a Samling Artist and Georg Solti Accademia Scholar. Tonight is his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

In 2018 Andri created Witness/Madman in the world premiere of George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's *Lessons in Love and Violence* at the Royal Ballet & Opera, reprising the production at the Dutch National Opera, Hamburg State Opera and Opéra de Lyon, and in concert staging with the Orchestre de Paris.

Other highlights include Superintendent Budd in *Albert Herring* (English National Opera, The Grange Festival); Speaker in *The Magic Flute*, Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Nebulous/Activist/Wolf in Purcell's *Masque of Might* (Opera North); Priest/Armed Man in *The Magic Flute* (Glyndebourne); Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (Kilden Opera); Figaro in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Icelandic Opera); Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* (Nevill Holt Opera); and Angelotti in a concert staging of *Tosca* at Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod.

As a recitalist, Andri has performed at the Oxford International Song Festival, Icelandic Opera, Aix-en-Provence Festival, Opéra de Lille, and Salurinn in Kópavogur, Iceland. His debut recital disc, *Thorsteinson & Schumann*, with pianist Ástríður Alda Sigurðardóttir was released in 2021 by Fuga Libera.



In Search of Purpose



Tonight's work and our 2026/27 season theme

At a moment of deep personal crisis in 1802, Ludwig van Beethoven confronted his hearing loss and questioned whether he could go on. In music, he found a way forward – and in doing so, transformed it into a powerful vehicle for human expression and resilience. From this journey, our 2026/27 season takes its title: 'In Search of Purpose'.

Throughout the season we'll trace Beethoven's path from despair to hope in his Fifth Symphony and a cycle of his piano concertos, and explore his ongoing legacy. And we hear from composers finding their purpose in the face of conflict, grief, oppression, and life's biggest questions.

Tonight, George Benjamin & Martin Crimp's powerful opera *Lessons in Love and Violence* explores questions of morality, responsibility and power, examining how personal desire and political ambition can shape – and destroy – human lives. In our season-long exploration of purpose, tonight's performance asks whether compassion and humanity can survive within systems shaped by control, oppression and conflict.

Check out the full season:
lpo.org.uk/purpose

Jesús Herrera on Purpose

Our Artistic Director on why he chose this season's theme, and why context matters



'While it's true that many of the iconic works we are so fortunate to perform were written decades or often centuries ago, they all emerged from artists who were driven to express something fundamentally human. This means the inspiration within these compositions can reflect experiences just as close to anyone in today's audience, regardless of their previous exposure to an orchestra.

As custodians of this incredible legacy, I believe it is a beautiful duty not just to present this repertoire because it is fantastic, but to be as generous as we can in how we provide that context. Exploring themes that amplify the depth of the music and connect listeners to its essence is a challenge, in my opinion, undoubtedly worth taking on.'

Jesús's full interview appeared in the latest issue of the LPO magazine, Tune In. *Read it online here:*



Synopsis

Lessons in Love and Violence

2018

Music by George Benjamin
Text by Martin Crimp

The Situation

The King lives in a close but uneasy relationship with his wife, Isabel, his two children, and his love, Gaveston, a man that the people fear and hate. With the country on the brink of famine and civil unrest, the King's military advisor, Mortimer, a utilitarian who believes that all forms of love are 'poison', accuses him of political irresponsibility. On an impulse, the King banishes Mortimer, setting off a chain of devastating events.

The Scenes

Part One

Scene 1

The banishment of Mortimer.

Scene 2

At Mortimer's instigation, Isabel is forced to confront the destitution and anger of the people, and agrees to the murder of Gaveston.

Scene 3

The King asks Gaveston to predict his – the King's – future. At a private entertainment, Gaveston is seized.

Scene 4

On learning that Gaveston has been killed, the King rejects Isabel, leaving him fatally isolated.

Part Two

Scene 5

Mortimer and Isabel set up house together. They groom the King's son to be puppet-king.

Scene 6

Mortimer visits the King in prison and persuades him to abdicate in his son's favour. Soon after this, the King encounters death.

Scene 7

The King's son breaks free from the control of his mother Isabel. Before an invited audience, he restores order.

Martin Crimp

Programme note

'Love me. Bind me to a rack of hot metal. Hold me – burn me forever in a crucible of fire.'

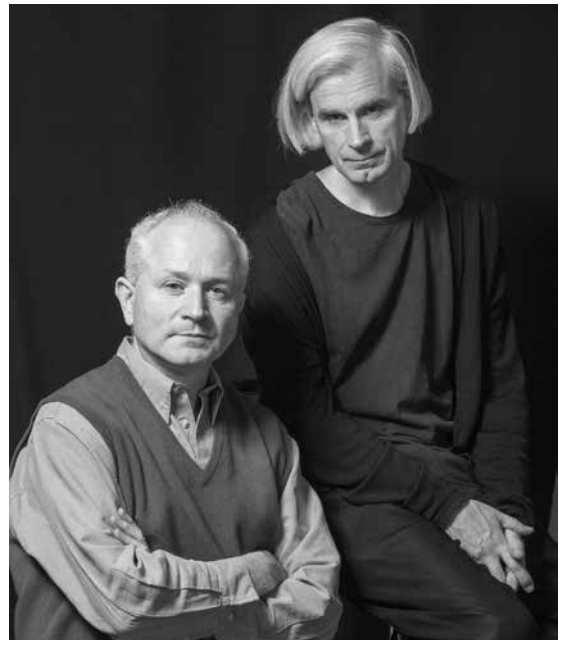
The dramatic gambit of George Benjamin and Martin Crimp's third opera is simple, explicit in the title: *Lessons in Love and Violence*. Seven scenes; seven lessons. But that division and opposition – 'Love and Violence' – is soon dissolved in a drama in which a rope around the neck is mercy, safety a prison cell, a razor-blade a kiss. The opera's lessons unpick the human tangle of the two: the stubbornly indivisible, Roger McGough-style loveandviolence.

For well over a decade now, over the course of four collaborations, composer and playwright Benjamin and Crimp have been teaching us their lessons – operatic parables on power, politics, transgression, desire and the darkest urges of human nature. These have swelled from the surgical intimacy of Pied Piper-inspired 2006 chamber opera *Into the Little Hill* into the ritual restraint of 2012's medieval legend *Written on Skin*, arriving at their broadest form yet in 2018's *Lessons in Love and Violence*. Its plot follows the outline of Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*: a king torn between his lover Gaveston and his queen; a family and kingdom caught in the political crossfire. A return to leaner, near-fairytale simplicity in 2023's *Picture a day like this* seems to signal the start of a new cycle.

Lessons in Love and Violence may make bigger, more brutal musical gestures than ever before, but the camera still zooms close in Crimp's text, tracing the emotional currents between husband and wife, mother and children, two lovers. The household of the earlier operas is now a nation-state, public and private yoked together in a high-stakes shadow play.

Orchestral Beginnings

Retrospectively, this operatic trilogy is absolutely coherent, a single trajectory of musical drama and thematic development. But in 2006 it seemed to arrive from nowhere, a fully formed theatrical philosophy all the more startling because Benjamin had spent three decades as a composer of the concert hall. There had been precocious works before, but the 1980 premiere of Benjamin's first orchestral work *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* announced the professional arrival of the 20-year-old composer, who had studied with Olivier Messiaen – making Benjamin the youngest ever composer to have a work performed at the BBC Proms.



© Maurice Foxall

George Benjamin & Martin Crimp

Can we trace Benjamin the opera composer back through his instrumental music? If there's a single thread connecting the two, perhaps it's a consistent tension between order or constraint and explosive release. There is 'no room for madness or for disorder inside the machinery of the regulated world,' statesman Mortimer warns the young prince and future Edward III in Scene 5 of *Lessons*. In Benjamin's music, however, it's precisely that disorder that renders a regulated world of counterpoint (*Three Consorts*), canons (*Shadowlines*, *Dance Figures*) and fugues (*Canon and Fugue*) dynamic, constantly tested by forces beyond their compass and control.

That Benjamin's structures are so meticulously crafted, so precise in their pacing, voicing and development, only makes shattering them more thrilling – as we hear in *Palimpsests*, where Benjamin drops a sonic portcullis on three meandering clarinets, or in *Three Inventions*, where mechanistic rhythmic exactitude melts into a soundworld beyond time itself.

Continues on next page

Programme note

From Abstraction to Opera

It's a gesture echoed in *Lessons*. Crimp's text lingers obsessively on the 'machine' of state politics mirrored by Benjamin in music that ticks and clicks and – devastatingly – stutters and stops altogether when the word 'dead' announces the King's assassination. Gaveston – the ghost in this machine – is accompanied by his own rhythms, thrumming in drums and harp, a percussive, booming cimbalom (still carrying with it the disquiet of *Into the Little Hill*) often joining them. It's an exotic rhythmic signature for a character who is agent of both love and death – a 'human razor'. His violent, unpredictable thrusts and slashes, as well as the coaxing sensuality of his vocal lines, all challenge the neat patterns of the state, suspending time and replacing it with an alternative, seductive temporality.

Alternatives, substitutes, parallels are everywhere in a drama built on sliding panels of elision, metaphor and metonymy, where to lose your crown is to lose your life. Edward II is never named, known only as 'the King'; Mortimer is destroyed by the loss of his name. How easy, then, if a man is no more than his title, to swap one king or statesman for another, to replace father with son, a first husband with a second. Musically too, it's surely no coincidence that Gaveston and the King are both cast as baritones: two halves of a musical whole, human body and body politic, slippery and interchangeable as they coil in the death-throes of their final duet.

Musical Architecture

'The world is the shape my music makes it,' the Stranger declares in *Into the Little Hill*. That relationship between art and life, music and the story it tells, is further explored in *Lessons* – an opera in which music is both theme and vehicle.

Structurally the continuous, two-part drama is arch-shaped. Four scenes build to the peak of the first half – the death of Gaveston – while a further three in the second trace the aftermath. The symmetry continues into the action. Each half grows towards an opera-within-an-opera: David's lament at the death of Jonathan (itself both parallel and portent of Gaveston's execution) in Scene Three and the Young King's closing command-performance in which history and murder so chillingly repeat. Political lessons, it seems, have been learned a little too well.

Three murders, two political coups, a deposition and a betrayal give the opera plenty of dramatic meat, but this isn't a piece that's interested in doing. If music is, famously, the space between the notes, then Benjamin and Crimp have devised a work that lives between the scenes. The spare, suggestive beauty of Crimp's text and Benjamin's music (which never states when it can imply, never implies where it can simply leave a dramatic door ajar) leaves room for the audience, inviting us in with a series of orchestral Interludes that ask us to turn director and project our own narratives onto them.

It's these that carry the emotional weight and colour of this intensely distilled, almost blanched drama. 'Let ours be regiment of tolerance and love,' the King orders at the end of Scene 1. But within a few bars the first Interlude casts that into doubt, growing to a full orchestral scream, divided violins grinding like sirens, anticipating the real world's invasion of the palace in Scene II. Again, after the King's death it's the orchestra that shakes us out of the intimate fantasy of this murder, beating us back to reality in pulsing demisemiquavers in woodwind, and percussion flickering like a nervous pulse at our temples.

Lessons is piece about violence and its limits, love and its lack of them. But where does art sit within Crimp and Benjamin's intricate structures of life, love and power? The Young King watches the first play and, silently, learns. It's then through a second that he so elegantly frames the murder and mutilation of Mortimer. In a final twist of the knife Crimp and Benjamin refuse to let that art – or their own – stand outside the horrors it depicts. In making something beautiful, orderly, from them they implicate themselves, and us too. The last line turns the auditorium on its head. The curtains close; 'Our entertainment begins,' says the Young King.

Programme note © Alexandra Coghlan, 2026

We'd love to hear from you

We hope you enjoy tonight's concert. Could you spare a few moments afterwards to complete a short survey about your experience? Your feedback will help to shape our future plans.

Just scan the QR code to begin the survey. Thank you!

Sir George Benjamin

Composer-in-Residence, London Philharmonic Orchestra



© Åsa Westerlund

Sir George Benjamin has been the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Composer-in-Residence since September 2025. As well as presenting new commissions and performances of his earlier works, during his residency he also champions the work of today's creators as mentor to our LPO Young Composers, providing guidance and expertise to the five participants each year.

On 24 February 2027, Benjamin's *Concerto for Orchestra* opens a Royal Festival Hall concert that also features music by Sibelius and Tippett, conducted by Edward Gardner. Last season, the Orchestra's opening concert in September 2025 launched with Benjamin's orchestral work *Ringed by the Flat Horizon*, and in February 2026, he conducted the Orchestra in a concert including his own piece *Palimpsests*, framed by works by Scriabin, Stravinsky and Ravel.

One of the leading figures in contemporary classical music, George Benjamin 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 music has been performed by notable conductors and orchestras worldwide, and his groundbreaking opera collaborations with Martin Crimp have created the modern classics *Into the Little Hill*, *Written on Skin* and *Lessons in Love and Violence*. Their 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 won the Contemporary Award at the 2025 Gramophone Awards.

Martin Crimp

playright



© Gautier Deblonde

Martin Crimp, born 1956, is a British playwright whose 1997 play *Attempts on her Life* established his international reputation. His plays range from elliptical dramas of contemporary life – *Definitely the Bahamas* (1987), *Dealing with Clair* (1989), *The Country* (2000), *The City* (2008), *Men Asleep* (2018) – via the two satirical 'entertainments' *Attempts on her Life* and *In the Republic of Happiness* (2012) – to re-imaginings of Greek classics – *Cruel & Tender* (2004) and *The rest will be familiar to you from cinema* (2013).

Recent notable productions include *When we have sufficiently tortured each other* (2019) and *The Misanthrope* (2026) at London's National Theatre, an adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* (2022) in London and New York, and *Men Asleep* (2026) in Paris.

His first encounter with composer George Benjamin led to the 'lyric tale' *Into the Little Hill* (Festival d'automne, 2006), followed by *Written on Skin* (Aix en Provence Festival, 2012), *Lessons in Love and Violence* (Royal Opera House, 2018) and *Picture a day like this* (Aix, 2023). Other musical collaborations include lyrics for composer Bernard Foccroulle (Bouffes du Nord, 2018) and text for pianist Pavel Kolesnikov (Aldeburgh, 2023).

Martin's first solo show as writer and performer, *Not one of these people* (2022), opened at the Carrefour Theatre Festival in Québec City before being invited to the Festival for International New Drama (FIND) at the Schaubuehne, Berlin. 2027 will see the premiere in Montreal of *The Animal Room*, with music by pop artist Roald van Oosten.

In 2020 Martin was awarded the Nyssen-Bansemer Theatre Prize.

In conversation with director Dan Ayling



Tonight's production is described as 'semi-staged' – what does that mean to you?

A semi-staging, as I understand it, is about stripping things back. There's no big set or costumes; there are minimal props and furniture. It's about what I'd call essentialising – what is absolutely necessary in terms of movement and gesture, what serves the story and what will complement it. Hopefully, in a semi-staging, the staging gently supports the story.

Does that benefit the music too, with the orchestra on stage?

Yes. It focuses attention less on the visual world. We live in a world full of visual data – we're bombarded with it daily – and a semi-staging brings the focus down onto the performers, the music, the text they're singing, and the relationships on stage. In some respects, you could say it purifies the experience.

Because you're stripping back so much of the visual and really focusing on the performers, the music and the text, you're encouraging everybody to embrace the power of listening. And I think that's so important. We don't listen enough, and so we don't properly engage with each other. The constant overwhelm of aural and visual stimuli means we just want to block it all out – we put our earbuds in and our dark glasses on and we disengage. But if you can push that away a bit and give yourself some space – actually look and listen, actually engage – it's amazing.

To you, is *Lessons in Love and Violence* a love story, a political thriller, or something else?

At its heart, I think it's a love story – but a very strange, twisted and weird love story. You look at the relationship between Gaveston and the King and think: why is the King so enamoured with him? What hold does he have over him? Is Gaveston even real? He is, of course – the other characters engage with him – but the power he seems to hold over the King is so strange. And he comes back later, too: in Scene 6 a character called the Stranger appears, played by the same performer, and you know it's Gaveston.

It's also about politics, and how love and politics intersect, so there's a political-thriller aspect to it as well. I also think it's a story about what we pass on – how our actions today impact the next generation, and what they learn from them. The title is *Lessons in Love and Violence*: what lessons does the young King learn throughout the piece? What do we learn about love, power, art and leadership?

Which character in the opera do you find most fascinating?

They're all fascinating – but I've become really interested in Mortimer. He's the King's chief political advisor and is very influential at court. But he really doesn't like Gaveston – he's homophobic towards him, I think – and he definitely doesn't like the effect the King's actions are having on the country. He aligns himself with Isabel, the Queen, and they begin a relationship – but is that real or manufactured to gain more power?

He begins the story with everything but is banished by the King and has nothing. Then after he and Isabel enact a coup and have Gaveston murdered, he forces the King to relinquish the crown and there is this incredible role reversal. Having been told by the King that he is nothing, he says to the King: 'You are nothing. You are no-one.' So he has such a big journey in the piece.

I'm also fascinated by the *ménage à trois* of the King, Isabel and Gaveston. What is Isabel's experience of all this? How is she balancing the public persona of being the wife of the country's leader with the fact that he very publicly has another lover – who happens to be a man? That's so potent and intense. And why does the King have this relationship? What is it that he loves so deeply about Gaveston that he'll give up his kingdom for him? And don't get me started on the children! What lessons is the Young King learning from all this? And will he repeat the mistakes of the past in the future?

Is there a moment in the opera that still gives you chills?

Absolutely. It's the moment when the King has died and his spirit leaves his body. It is so calm and simple, musically very delicate and very gentle – I can feel the hairs going up on the back of my neck now. It's something very special.

What was it that drew you to this work when you first encountered it?

The incredible detail in both the text and the music. It's a very taut piece of drama. It goes straight to the heart of the argument and has a real intensity and rigour because of it.

Martin Crimp's text doesn't waste anything; every word is there for a reason. The same with George's music.

And it's the combination of George's incredible music with Martin's very precise words that creates something hypnotic. We almost always put the composer on a pedestal, but in this partnership, it's the marriage of the two of them that makes the work. The text and music working together in service of the drama. It's powerful stuff.

Dan Ayling was in conversation with Greg Felton.

Watch Dan's full interview on our YouTube channel

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