

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

United Strings of Europe: Send Back the Echo

Saturday 9 May 2026, 8pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

We are proud to be a place where people come together to discover and connect with the wonder of classical music. Throughout the year, we provide unrivalled opportunities to encounter, live in person, the full range of music, and a variety of different ways for you to experience it.

Some of the world's most exciting artists, including our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists, join us to shine a light on this incredible art form. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2026.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Jessie Montgomery <i>Strum</i>	7'
Jasmin Kent Rodgman <i>send back the echo</i>	8'
Gareth Farr <i>Mondo Rondo</i> arr. Julian Azkoul for string orchestra	
I. <i>Mondo Rondo</i>	
II. <i>Mumbo Jumbo</i>	
III. <i>Mambo Rambo</i>	14'
Evelyn Glennie <i>A Little Prayer</i> arr. I-Han Fu for string orchestra with text adapted by Vilma Jackson	4'
Beethoven <i>String Quartet in F minor, Op.95 (Serioso)</i> arr. Julian Azkoul for string orchestra	
I. <i>Allegro con brio</i>	
II. <i>Allegretto ma non troppo</i> –	
III. <i>Allegro assai vivace ma serioso – Più allegro</i>	
IV. <i>Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato – Allegro</i>	22'

Performers

United Strings of Europe

Julian Azkoul *violin, director*

Ellie Fagg *violin*

Ariel Lang *violin*

Marie Schreer *violin*

Kay Stephen *viola*

Dominic Stokes *viola*

Raphael Lang *cello*

Ben Michaels *cello*

Marianne Schofield *double bass*

Vilma Jackson *actor*

In 2020 we commissioned Jasmin Kent Rodgman to write a new work to mark the Beethoven anniversary celebrations. When lockdowns meant we couldn't put on concerts, the project morphed into *send back the echo*, a film Jasmin directed with actor and film-maker Vilma Jackson, herself a Deaf artist. *send back the echo* is a journey inspired by a deaf musician; it invites a moment of reflection on the alienation faced by the d/Deaf community and people of colour within music, culture and the arts.

In designing a live event around *send back the echo*, we wanted to bring hearing and d/Deaf audiences together by having a pre-concert workshop led by Deaf musician Ruth Montgomery and signed interpretation throughout. *A Little Prayer* by Dame Evelyn Glennie, arranged here for strings by I-Han Fu, is enhanced by text from the composer explaining how she uses her body to hear music. Vilma has artistically reinterpreted Evelyn's words and adapted them into British Sign Language for tonight's performance. To highlight different contemporary voices, we chose lively works from around the world: African-American composer Jessie Montgomery's *Strum* and New Zealander Gareth Farr's *Mondo Rondo*. We then come full circle with one of Beethoven's most intense and compact chamber music works, his Op.95 *String Quartet (Serioso)*, adapted for the ensemble on stage tonight.

We are grateful to the Southbank Centre for being our partners in the UK premiere of this project and to The Radcliffe Trust and The Skinners' Charitable Foundation for making it possible.

Introduction by Julian Azkoul, artistic director of United Strings of Europe

The concert starts with four pieces that are all quite recent and quite short. First comes *Strum* by the New York composer and violinist Jessie Montgomery, whose electrically-pulsed and tuneful music has had no trouble crossing the Atlantic. A new cello concerto by her, *These Righteous Paths*, will be performed at this summer's Proms. *Strum*, composed in 2006 and revised six years later, can be performed by a string quartet or, as here, by a larger group. Montgomery's note on the piece gives us some inside information:

*This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.
There is no interval.*

'I utilised texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic repetitions that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.'

In *send back the echo*, the British-Malaysian composer Jasmin Kent Rodgman dares to have music speak of silence: the silence of Beethoven in his deafness and the silence of nature, especially of trees, that Beethoven in his summer country walks felt spoke to him. Rodgman composed the piece during the great silence of the coronavirus lockdown in 2020 for a short film she directed. The soloist in the film, as in this evening's performance, is Vilma Jackson, herself silent, interpreting extracts from Beethoven's letters in sign language. Rodgman's music does not quote Beethoven's but suggests, rather, his silent promenades through the forest and the sting of deafness.

Next comes *Mondo Rondo* by Gareth Farr, a composer and percussionist from New Zealand. Made in 1997 for string quartet, the music was arranged in 2019 for United Strings of Europe by the ensemble's director, Julian Azkoul, who has written of how he recognised, the first time he heard the quartet version, that 'the visceral energy permeating the work and the grooving rhythms in the second and third movements made it particularly well-suited for orchestral reinforcement.' To heighten contrasts, he kept the option of returning here and there to the original quartet texture. The composer's notes are as irresistible as his music:

'The first movement is a slightly wonky homage to some of the composers who have inspired me – namely, Béla Bartók, Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich. By no means is it an homage to be taken seriously, though.

"'Mumbo Jumbo' begins as a study in pizzicato, and I employ the technique of hocketing, whereby the tune is built up from a few notes contributed by each instrument in turn – an effect inspired by Balinese funeral marching music, in which a loud crashy rhythmic mix of cymbals and gongs is intended to frighten the demons away.

'The scales, hypnotic rhythms and melodies of the finale have a flavour of Morocco. However, once I get stuck in a loop, I tend to get bored, so, as in most of my work, the music continually interrupts and falls over itself, like a drunk at a dinner party.'

This quick world tour ends back in Britain with *A Little Prayer*, arranged by Taiwan-born, Finland-based musician I-Han Fu from a piece Evelyn Glennie composed at the age of 13 for solo marimba. Once again, out of deafness comes music.

Then Beethoven returns, not as a historical figure now but in the living music of his Op.95 String Quartet, which he composed in 1810 and himself called 'Quartetto serioso'. The arrangement is once more by Azkoul.

The work is extraordinarily compact, condensing what it has to say and moving sometimes quite abruptly from one thing to another, which it can do by virtue of allusive motivic connections. For example, not only is there no exposition repeat in the first movement but most of this movement's material comes out of the forceful gesture delivered in the first bar and ensuing downbeat: a scalar swivel around the keynote, F, up and down and up again. All the instruments, in octaves, are in their lowest register, asserting F minor, then casting doubt on it before coming decisively home on F. This whole idea – which immediately stirs alarm in the first violin, jumping up and down from one C to another – runs through a large part of the movement, present or implied. However, there is also a beautiful singing phrase as second subject, in the relative major (A flat), rising and falling through triplets, and never played by the first violin, which ranges high above, adding to the richness of the texture in which the theme is embedded. Everything is short and emphatic: exposition, development, recapitulation and coda.

Less driven, only because its atmosphere is one of doubt and searching, the second movement is in a chromatic D major, and includes two fugal episodes before finding its ending in continuing and extending its search, the melody now an octave higher. This reprise carries on into the scherzo, which goes at a cantering dotted rhythm. In complete contrast, the trio section fields phrases in slow harmony from the three lower instruments with violin decoration. After both these types have been fully set out, shreds of them – again the compactness – recur to complete an ABABA form.

The sense of music being torn off is partly countered by the slow introduction to the finale, though this rapidly develops a yearning momentum and, after only seven bars, gives way to another fast riding rhythm as the concluding sonata rondo gets going. Acute anxiety and dynamism continue until, suddenly, a doorway out of the darkness appears, and the music skitters off in an F major coda.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2026

Find out more

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- ▶ [Vilma Jackson](#)
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](#)

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Embrace a bold and colourful sound-world as Manchester Collective brings to life work by titans in contemporary experimental music, including Meredith Monk.