

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Martha Argerich & Dong Hyek Lim

Thursday 2 April 2026, 7pm | Royal Festival 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

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### Repertoire

Schubert Fantasia in F minor for piano duet, D.940 19'

Mozart Sonata in C for piano duet, K.521 22'

Interval

Rachmaninov Symphonic Dances arr. for 2 pianos 35'

### Performers

Martha Argerich *piano*

Dong Hyek Lim *piano*

*This performance lasts approximately 2 hours.  
There is a 20-minute interval.*

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### Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

#### Fantasia in F minor for piano duet, D.940

Born in Himmelpfortgrund, Vienna, Franz Schubert was the 12th child of a schoolmaster and at first followed in his father's footsteps. His prodigious musical talent, however, set songs, piano pieces, chamber music, orchestral works and operas pouring from his pen at an extraordinary rate.

Schubert caught syphilis in 1822 or 1823, a then-incurable illness that caused emotional suffering in him as acute as its physical effects. The assumption that his late works anticipate his impending death is nevertheless questionable; he died aged 31 of another infection, possibly typhoid fever, sooner than anyone might have expected. Despite his youth, he left over 950 works, many unpublished and unperformed in his lifetime.

Early in 1828, Schubert's fortunes enjoyed an upswing. Two publishers were asking him for new pieces, and Beethoven's recent death had possibly left a vacancy for the role of Vienna's leading composer. Schubert wrote fast, perhaps anticipating a much-desired breakthrough. The result was a stream of

masterpieces, including the three final piano sonatas, the G major String Quartet, the C major String Quintet, the song cycle *Schwanengesang*, and the Fantasia in F minor for piano duet.

Schubert's piano duets occupy several substantial volumes; as a popular home entertainment, they were eminently publishable, which could explain the quantity. He had further motivation: an unrequited passion for one of his pupils, Countess Karoline Esterházy von Galánta. Such was their difference in social status that the only way he could be close to her was at the piano, playing duets. The F minor Fantasia is dedicated to her.

It has an unusual structure and a haunting principal idea, an undulating figure that returns almost obsessively. Sandwiched between returns of the opening material are a sombre slow section full of Baroque-style dotted rhythms and ornaments, a scherzo and trio, and a fugue. The work's sheer strangeness is highlighted by the switch of key from F minor to F sharp minor for the central episodes. The final moments, however, find the music sinking back into the sorrows from which it arose.

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

#### Sonata in C for piano duet, K.521

As child prodigies being paraded around 1760s Europe by their father, little Wolfgang Amadeus and his sister, Maria Anna, helped to popularise the playing of duets. Later, writing them brought out some of the mature Mozart's most delicious qualities, their interpersonal interactions unleashing his impish wit and warmth.

Dating from May 1787, the C major Sonata, K.521, was published the following year and dedicated to Mozart's pupil Babette Natorp and her sister Nanette, daughters of a Viennese merchant. The composer had already sent it, however, to another favourite pupil, Franziska von Jacquin. He asked her brother, Gottfried, to 'have the goodness to give the sonata to my lady, your sister, with my compliments – but she might have a go at it immediately, for it is a bit difficult'. He had

nicknamed Franziska 'Signora Diniminimi' – mingling 'minim' and 'diminution' – for her ability to play fast. This sonata gave her ample opportunity.

Mozart's meticulous personal catalogue of his works gives the sonata's date as 29 May 1787, the day he heard that his father, Leopold, had passed away. The sonata, though, betrays no trace of calamity. It is in the classic three-movement form of a concerto or short symphony: a sonata-form allegro, full of jokey exchanges and lyrical good humour, followed by a graceful slow movement in triple metre in which a minuet-like idea contrasts with a more turbulent central episode. The finale opens with an innocuously simple theme which Mozart uses to spark a whirl of continual invention, powering the sonata to an effervescent finish.

## **Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943)**

### **Symphonic Dances arr. for 2 pianos**

When Sergei Rachmaninov and his family left Russia in 1917 after the Revolution, they had to start a new life virtually from scratch. They lived first in Copenhagen, then emigrated to the USA in 1918; and in the early 1930s Rachmaninov built a villa above Lake Lucerne in Switzerland.

In Russia he had been hailed as heir to Tchaikovsky, whose praise and encouragement had helped to launch his career; he was a composer first, a pianist second. As an exile, however, he had to earn a living, which he did at the piano, for the West was swift to laud him as among the greatest of his day. In demand for recitals and concertos, he had little time left to compose amid all the practising. Only six of his opus numbers date from his years in exile, and the *Symphonic Dances* was the last.

It dates from summer to autumn 1940 and was written in the US, to which the family had returned, away from the stormclouds of the Second World War. Though best known in its orchestral incarnation, which Rachmaninov dedicated to the conductor Eugene Ormandy and his Philadelphia Orchestra, the work's two-piano version came first; and the title *Symphonic Dances* superseded the original *Fantastic Dances*.

It had initially been intended as a ballet score for Rachmaninov's old friend Michel Fokine to choreograph. Fokine's death in 1942 meant that that never happened. (It has been successfully done since, notably by Liam Scarlett for the Royal Ballet.)

Rachmaninov's scenario was the outline of a day, a metaphor for the progress of life. The three movements are 'Midday', 'Twilight' and 'Midnight'.

The first movement ticks softly into action, creating a motoric momentum that builds to a set of jagged chords, almost a take-off of a then-fashionable tone-row (its top line uses all 12 notes, though some are repeated). The ensuing main theme is all about energy and rhythm, while the middle section presents a nostalgic melody with the flavour of Russian folk music – in the orchestral version a saxophone solo, though Rachmaninov once considered having it sung wordlessly by the contralto Marian Anderson. After the main theme returns, a final section, turning towards the major, quotes a theme from Rachmaninov's Symphony No.1, which was still unpublished following its disastrous premiere in 1897.

The second movement is a fantastical waltz, almost second-cousin to the one in Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*. An introductory section, with whirling figuration, ushers in a lilting, sensuous melody, which flowers out into close harmonies rather like a big band. There is nothing escapist or reassuring about this waltz; if this is twilight, it has the same shifting, unsettling quality as that hour of approaching darkness.

In the dances' mirror of life, the finale's midnight equates to approaching death. Rachmaninov delivers a veritable danse macabre, perhaps haunted by the spectre of the war that was raging across Europe. Its nervous propulsion is heightened by quotations from the Dies Irae plainchant, a favourite reference for the composer, counterbalanced by a liturgical theme from his *All-Night Vigil*, 'Blagosloven yesi, Gospodii' (Blessed be the Lord). The nightmarish atmosphere finally dissolves into optimism; and on the coda the composer wrote 'Alleluia'.

**Programme notes © Jessica Duchon, 2026**

#### **Find out more**

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