

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Iveta Apkalna & State Choir LATVIJA

Sunday 7 June 2026, 3pm | 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

Repertoire

Arvo Pärt <i>Pari intervallo</i> for organ	5'
Arvo Pärt <i>Nunc dimittis</i> for chorus	6'
Rihards Dubra <i>Herr, bleib bei uns!</i> for chorus	5'
Pēteris Vasks <i>Zīles ziņa</i> (The tomtit's message) for chorus	8'
Pēteris Vasks <i>Dona nobis pacem</i> for chorus & organ	14'
<i>Interval</i>	
Bach <i>Fantasia in G, BWV.572</i> (Pièce d'orgue), BWV.572	10'
Elgar <i>Lux aeterna</i> (Nimrod) from <i>Enigma Variations</i> arr. John Cameron for chorus	4'
Purcell <i>Hear my prayer, O Lord</i> for chorus arr. Sven David Sandström	6'
Thierry Escaich <i>Evocation II</i> for organ	5'
Thierry Escaich <i>3 Motets</i> for chorus & organ	12'
Gardiner <i>Evening hymn</i> for chorus & organ	6'

Performers

State Choir LATVIJA
Iveta Apkalna *organ*

Arvo Pärt (b.1935)

Pari intervallo for organ

There is a sense of timelessness running through the Estonian and Latvian music that makes up the first half of today's concert, as if the pieces channel ancient sounds through ideas very much of our own times. Estonia's most prominent contemporary composer, Arvo Pärt, most vividly exemplifies that uncanny mix of old and new in his self-named 'tintinnabuli' works that strip music back to its rawest, most fundamental ingredients, yet also take a deeply spiritual perspective on bare harmonies and sonic purity.

Pari intervallo is one of Pärt's earliest 'tintinnabuli' works, emerging in 1976 after a self-imposed eight-year compositional silence as almost a concept of a piece, written in four musical lines but with no specific instruments in mind. Pärt created today's organ version in 1980. He wrote the piece in memory of his stepfather, and the quotation from Paul's Epistle to the Romans with which he prefaces the work makes clear its spiritual subject matter: 'For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord'.

Its title – literally 'of equal distance' – is essentially a description of the piece's workings: its two, slow-moving melody lines remain separated by the same distance from start to finish.

Arvo Pärt

Nunc dimittis for chorus

By the time Pärt came to write his choral *Nunc dimittis* in 2001, the earlier strictness and austerity of his 'tintinnabuli' style had loosened and relaxed considerably, though his musical purity remains unmistakable. The piece was commissioned by the Choir of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, and premiered there during the city's 2001 festival. Again, Pärt's spiritual focus is clear: the *Nunc dimittis* – also known as the *Canticle of Simeon* – narrates the Presentation of Christ at the Temple in Jerusalem from the Gospel of Luke. The elderly Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, and is later presented with the infant Jesus, going on to depart his earthly life in peace and joy. Pärt's music conveys hushed wonder and awe, even within the piece's sombre minor mode, with a sudden radiance on the word 'lumen' (light) as it shifts into the brighter major.

This performance lasts approximately 2 hours.

There is a 20-minute interval.

Rihards Dubra (b.1964)

Herr, bleib bei uns! for chorus

Riga-born composer, organist and cantor Rihards Dubra occupies a very different musical world to that of Arvo Pärt, even if he singles out his Estonian colleague as a particularly powerful inspiration. Even within Dubra's reassuringly rich and traditional-sounding harmonies, there's a sense of purity and fragility that's distinctively of our own times. *Herr, bleib bei uns!* is one of very many choral works by Dubra, and its text – again from the Gospel of Luke – recounts the appearance of the resurrected Christ on the Road to Emmaus, when two of his disciples realise his identity and beg him to stay with them as night falls. Dubra reflects the joy and hope of recognition in his disarmingly direct music.

Pēteris Vasks (b.1946)

Zīles ziņa (The tomtit's message) for chorus

As Pärt is to Estonia, then so surely is Pēteris Vasks to Latvia, though Vasks' immensely powerful, emotionally intense music often enriches its underlying simplicity with dramatic contrasts and extremes of mood. His choral work *Zīles ziņa* (The tomtit's message) from 1981 sets a brief poem by his compatriot Uldis Bērziņš. The tomtit is the bearer of news in Latvian folklore, and it is this bird that tells the writer his brother has departed for war, raising the possibility that he may never return. Vasks' music moves from a brooding opening that seems to anticipate the tomtit's announcement to a faster, galloping central section as the brother speeds away on horseback, closing with an agonising contemplation of the slow passing of time as the young man remains absent.

Pēteris Vasks

Dona nobis pacem for chorus & organ

Though written 16 years later, Vasks' 1997 *Dona nobis pacem* in many ways feels like a companion piece to *Zīles ziņa*. It is a prayer for peace and mercy whose intense and shifting emotions are sustained through seemingly endless repetitions of the text in its three-word title, begging God for peace. Vasks moves from yearning to pleading, even anger and desperation at the prospect that the longed-for peace may never come, ending with a fragile sense of hope.

JS Bach (1685–1750)

Fantasia in G (Pièce d'orgue), BWV.572

We head away from the Baltic countries for the second half of today's concert, to discover instead a German composer looking to France for inspiration. The Fantasia in G – also known as *Pièce d'orgue* – is one of JS Bach's most unusual organ works, and was probably written in the early 1700s during the composer's time as organist and concertmaster at the Weimar court. He immersed himself in both German and French organ music during this period, paying special attention to the *Livre d'orgue* by French organist/composer Nicolas de Grigny. And the Fantasia in G is surely Bach's response to the more dramatic, theatrical, exuberant French organ style. After a brilliant opening toccata that sounds almost improvised, the Fantasia's main material arrives in its monumental, slow-moving five-voice central section. Bach concludes by returning to some of the energy of his opening, though it's changed forever by what we've just experienced.

Edward Elgar (1857–1934), arr. John Cameron (b.1944)

Lux aeterna (Nimrod) from Enigma Variations

Of the 13 vivid, sometimes vicious musical portraits of friends, family and himself in Edward Elgar's 1899 *Enigma Variations*, it's 'Nimrod' that's lodged itself most firmly in musical imaginations – not least because its uncanny mix of nobility, solemnity and deep emotion makes it the ideal musical counterpart to Armistice Day remembrance. British composer and arranger John Cameron has worked across theatre, film and television, with Ken Loach, Cilla Black and Hot Chocolate, among many luminaries. He reimagined Elgar's 'Nimrod' in 1996 as a choral work, using another liturgical text: the 'Lux aeterna' is a prayer for the departed, asking that they be granted eternal rest and light.

Henry Purcell (c.1659–95)

arr. Sven-David Sandström (1942–2019)

Hear my prayer, O Lord for chorus

From one modern-day reimagining of a classic piece of music to another. Henry Purcell's 'Hear my prayer, O Lord' comes from around 1682, and was created at the start of Purcell's several years as Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey. Swedish composer Sven-David Sandström was himself a prolific creator of choral music, and made his new arrangement of Purcell's original in 1986. He leaves it mostly intact: from humble beginnings, the piece expands in rich textures and more colourful harmonies until it reaches a towering dissonance. From there, Sandström fragments what we've just heard, recombining ideas in an increasingly desperate plea for God's understanding and recognition.

Thierry Escaich (b.1965)

Évocation II for organ

We bring the line of eminent organist/composers up to the present day with Thierry Escaich, currently organist at Paris' Notre-Dame Cathedral (he composed a choral *Te Deum* for the fire-ravaged edifice's reopening in 2025). His *Évocation* No.2 comes from 1996, and was written for the Festival of Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges in the central Pyrenees. Like today's earlier organ works, it's built on an implacable, insistent bass note that continues almost unwaveringly throughout. Above it, however, Escaich builds an increasingly furious battle between competing musical ideas. The purity of an unadorned C major attempts to assert itself – as it did in today's opening piece – but it's swept aside by the drama of the competing elements, building to a conclusion of monumental force.

Thierry Escaich

Three Motets for chorus & organ

- 1 *Motet I*
- 2 *Motet II*
- 3 *Motet III*

Escaich's *Three Motets* from 1998 each set a brief poem by French writer Alain Suied, alongside an accompanying plainchant text chosen by the composer. The imagery of a newborn baby in the first finds a complement in the Christmas plainchant 'Puer natus est nobis', with the organ acting as a mediator between the two competing musics. To the more dramatic second motet, which imagines facing death, Escaich adds the Latin text 'De profundis', its abrupt, urgent music

ultimately giving way to a heartbeat-like idea from the organ. The third motet considers hope as a means of escaping death, and Escaich complements Suied's verse with the 'Kyrie eleison' text, its joyful, dance-like rhythms providing more contact and less conflict between the two strands of music, leading to a dramatic, optimistic close.

Henry Balfour Gardiner (1877–1950)

Evening Hymn for chorus & organ

The concert closes with an English hymn from the 20th century. London-born Henry Balfour Gardiner was a prolific composer but also an intensely self-critical one: of the

relatively few of his works that survived his destruction, his *Evening Hymn* from 1908 is by far his best-known. It's a lush, richly Romantic setting of the Latin hymn 'Te lucis ante terminum' asking for God's protection at the end of the day. Gardiner provides different music for each of the hymn's three verses: the first grows in richness before the organ falls silent for the unaccompanied choir's hushed, fearful contemplation of night's threats in the second, while the final verse returns resplendently to the piece's opening music, closing with quietly ecstatic final 'amens'.

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2026

Texts and translations

ARVO PÄRT Nunc dimittis

Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine,
secundum verbum tuum in pace,
quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum,
quod parasti ante faciem
omnium populorum,
lumen ad revelationem gentium
et gloriam plebis tuae Israel.

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto, sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Text: Luke 2, 29–32

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in
peace, according to thy word:
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared
before the face of all people;
A light to lighten the Gentiles,
and the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
Both now and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Translation: Anon.

RIHARDS DUBRA Herr, bleib bei uns!

Herr, bleib bei uns,
denn es will Abend werden,
und der Tag hat sich geneiget.

Text: Luke 24:29

Stay with us,
for it is toward evening
and the day is now far spent.

Translation: Anon.

PĒTERIS VASKS Zīles ziņa

Kas sit pie vārtiem šorīt
gulēt gribu
Aizraudātas acis lec saule mākoņos
lai mazais brālis jā, lai kumeļam nav grūti.
Nē smejas kara kungs.
Un tik vien paliek:
mētelis to auzu skaru
tā cepure to zirņu ziedu
paiet gadu daudz.

Text: Uldis Bērziņš (1944)

Who knocks at the gate this morning?
I want to sleep.
Eyes wet with tears, the sun rises through the clouds.
That the little brother rides, to spare the foal.
No, the warlord laughs.
And this is what remains:
a cloak of oat panicles,
this hat of pea flowers.
Many years pass.

Translation: Anon.

PĒTERIS VASKS Dona nobis pacem

Dona nobis pacem.

Grant us peace.

ELGAR Lux aeterna

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine,
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis, quia pius es.

May eternal light shine on them, Lord,
with your saints for ever, for you are good.
Give them eternal rest, Lord,
and may light perpetual shine upon them, for you are good.

Translation: Anon.

PURCELL Hear My Prayer, O Lord

Hear my prayer, O Lord,
and let my crying unto thee.

THIERRY ESCAICH Three Motets

Motet I

Enveloppé dans les langes du regard, le nourrisson boit des yeux la fable du monde.

Chair et drap : dans les replis se devine et se déforme la source de tous nos rêves.

Le cristal du cœur recueille les eaux natales de l'univers. Invente le monde.

Éveille-toi au premier silence du regard.

Quand tout nous est donné par inadvertance dans la chaleur d'un cri.

Le monde vient de naître si tu lui tends les bras.

Motet II

Le regard fixe, impénétrable de la Mort, le masque sans contours, un jour, nous lui ferons face, un jour, il nous désignera.

Ce sera une voix un désir fatigué un cri, une couleur : on ne sait jamais.

Ce sera la peine d'un enfant ou le murmure d'un fantôme et soudain les yeux brûlés par sa présence interdite, nous reconnaitrons son appel entre tous.

Motet III

Qu'est-ce qui nous traque et nous tord et se joue de nous derrière nos masques ?

Qu'est-ce qui souffre et se révolte au fond de nous malgré nos rêves ?

Qui es-tu, triste matière silencieuse ?

De quel parage du ciel es-tu la messagère oubliée, de quelle détresse es-tu le gouffre indéchiffrable ?

Qu'est-ce qui nous porte et nous appelle et nous élève au-dessus de nous dans l'espérance ?

Text: Alain Suied

GARDINER Evening Hymn

Te lucis ante terminum,
Rerum Creator poscimus,
Ut solita clementia
Sis præsul ad custodiam.

Procul recedant somnia,
Et noctium phantasmata;
Hostemque nostrum comprime,
Ne pollutantur corpora.

Præsta, Pater omnipotens,
Per Iesum Christum Dominum,
Qui tecum in perpetuum
Regnat cum Sancto Spiritu.
Amen.

Text: Anon

Wrapped in the swaddling clothes of your gaze, the infant drinks in the world's fable with its eyes.

Flesh and cloth: in the folds, the source of all our dreams is glimpsed and distorted.

The crystal of the heart gathers the primordial waters of the universe. Invent the world.

Awaken to the first silence of your gaze.

When everything is given to us inadvertently in the warmth of a cry.

The world comes alive if you reach out to it.

Death's fixed, impenetrable gaze, its shapeless mask – one day we will face it, one day it will point us out.

It will be a voice, a weary longing, a cry, a colour: you never know.

It will be a child's sorrow or the whisper of a ghost, and suddenly, our eyes burning with its forbidden presence, we will recognise its call among all others.

What is it that stalks us, twists us, and plays with us behind our masks?

What is it that suffers and rebels deep within us despite our dreams?

Who are you, sad, silent matter?

From what realm of heaven are you the forgetful messenger, from what unfathomable abyss are you the unfathomable chasm?

What is it that carries us, calls to us, and lifts us above ourselves in hope?

Translation: Anon.

Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That with thy wonted favor,
Thou Would'st be our guard and keeper now.

From all ill dreams defend our eyes,
From nightly fears and fantasies;
Tread under foot our ghostly foe,
That no pollution we may know.

O Father, that we ask be done,
Through Jesus Christ, Thine only Son;
Who, with the Holy Ghost and Thee,
Shall live and reign eternally.
Amen.

Translation: Anon

Find out more

▶ State Choir LATVIJA

▶ Iveta Apkalna

▶ southbankcentre.co.uk

You might also like...

Mariam Batsashvili: Bach & Liszt

Saturday 26 September 2026, 6pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

The widely admired pianist presents bold musical reinventions across centuries, from operatic Handel, Bellini and Gounod to Busoni's epic Bach Chaconne.