



# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## MULTITUDES TURANGALÎLA: INFINITE LOVE

Thursday 23 April 2026, 7.30pm | Royal Festival Hall

Welcome to *Multitudes*, our multi-arts festival powered by orchestral music. We're bringing together some of the world's finest classical music ensembles – including our six Resident Orchestras – for collaborations with an incredible range of artists from different art forms. Together, we're creating a new way for you to encounter the enduring power of classical music, with unique, adventurous, boundary-breaking concerts. It's a musical experience like no other!

Mark Ball, Artistic Director, Southbank Centre

Commissioned by the Southbank Centre and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Imagine an explosion of love on a cosmic scale. Mix in some 1940s Hollywood glamour, a pounding rhythmic workout and the sounds of a Javanese gamelan, and then wash it all in blissful impressionist colours. Inspired by the intoxicating doomed love story of Tristan and Isolde, Messiaen's exuberant *Turangalîla-symphonie* still sounds like nothing else on earth today, nearly 80 years after its 1949 premiere.

*Turangalîla-symphonie* demands an orchestra of huge forces – and tonight a super-sized Royal Philharmonic Orchestra collaborates with 1927 Studios to conjure Messiaen's psychedelic masterpiece in music and visuals.

The visionary team behind the Komische Opera Berlin's 2012 production of *The Magic Flute*, 1927 Studios is known for combining performance and live music with animation and film, and they have created a brand new stop-animation film in direct response to *Turangalîla-symphonie* especially for *Multitudes*. Taking inspiration, like Messiaen, from Tristan and Isolde, and the golden age of silent cinema, 1927 Studios' epic silent-film narrative captures Messiaen's ecstatic vision. The film is woven throughout the symphony, submerging us in this wild world.

'A love song, a hymn to joy, time, movement, rhythm, life and death' was how Messiaen himself described this vast, vibrant work, conducted tonight by Vasily Petrenko and featuring soloists Steven Osborne and Cécile Lartigau. This is indeed music that contains multitudes.

### MUSIC

Messiaen *Turangalîla-symphonie*

80 mins

### CREATIVE TEAM

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Vasily Petrenko *conductor*

Steven Osborne *piano*

Cécile Lartigau *ondes martenot*

1927 Studios *animation*

*Run time (approx.): 1 hour and 30 minutes, with no interval*

#### Film credits

Written and directed by 1927 Studios  
Animation by Paul Barritt and Francesco Roych  
1927 are Suzanne Andrade, Esme Appleton and Paul Barritt

#### With

Jake Cecil as The Knight  
Esme Appleton as The Bride  
Ben Whitehead as The Knave  
Bruno Pearson as The King  
Suzanne Andrade as The Alchemist  
Will Close as The Vicar  
Simon Schelvis and Fraser Benstead as The Henchmen  
Iain Chambers as The Masked Musician  
Madeline Elliott, Nathan Gregory, Sarah Munro as The Villagers

Produced by Judith Dimant. Finance Lucy Williams

With very special thanks to Sands Film Studio for use of their theatre, costumes and wisdom.



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# OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908–92)

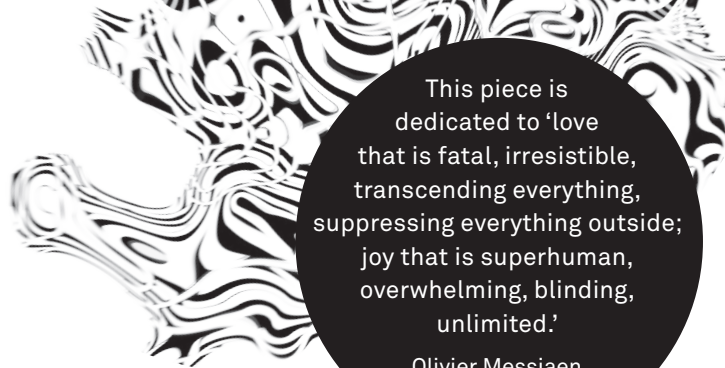
## Turungalîla-symphonie

1. Introduction *Modéré, un peu vif*
2. Chant d'amour (Love song) 1 *Modéré, lourd*
3. Turungalîla 1 *Presque lent, rêveur*
4. Chant d'amour 2 *Bien modéré*
5. Joie du sang des étoiles (Joy of the Blood of the Stars) *Vif, passionné avec joie*
6. Jardin du sommeil d'amour (Garden of Love's Sleep) *Très modéré, très tendre*
7. Turungalîla 2 *Un peu vif, bien modéré*
8. Développement d'amour (Development of Love) *Bien modéré*
9. Turungalîla 3 *Bien modéré*
10. Final *Modéré, presque vif, avec une grande joie*

In the wake of the Second World War, Serge Koussevitzky wrote to Paris-based composer, Olivier Messiaen, asking for a new piece to be written for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Koussevitzky had been the American orchestra's conductor for over 20 years and was an early champion of Messiaen's work: in 1936, he conducted *Les Offrandes oubliées* (The Forgotten Offerings), the first international performance of the composer's music. In his request, Koussevitzky gave no guidance on how long the new piece should be, how many musicians it should use, or what structure or subject it should have. Messiaen quickly accepted, confidently responding that the new piece would be ready in 'a minimum of six months, a maximum of one year'. It seems likely that even the composer did not anticipate the scale of the piece, as it was finally completed some three years later in 1948. Little did Koussevitzky know that his open invitation was to become one of Messiaen's most ambitious and iconic works.

Messiaen's *Turungalîla-symphonie* (pronounced tour-ahn-gu-lee-lah) takes its name from two Sanskrit words: 'Turanga' meaning movement or rhythm, and 'Lîla' meaning play. Although described as *symphonie* (symphony), it bears little resemblance to the 19th-century works which share this title. Rather than the usual four movements, this expansive symphony unfolds in ten, each with its own subtitle, from the dreamlike 'Jardin du sommeil d'amour' (Garden of the Sleep of Love) to the exuberant 'Joie du sang des étoiles' (Joy of the Blood of the Stars). The standard orchestral forces have been expanded too, with extra musicians required in every section of the orchestra and an extensive array of percussion instruments, including vibraphone, temple blocks, maracas and a Provençal tabor. At its core is a fiendishly difficult solo piano part, performed tonight by Steven Osborne. The part was originally written for Messiaen's long-time collaborator, Yvonne Loriod, who later married the composer in 1961.

The *Turungalîla-symphonie* also features the ondes martenot, an early electronic instrument similar to the theremin. It can be played either by using a piano-like keyboard or by moving a ring along a metal ribbon to change the pitch. Capable of producing both sweet song-like melodies and dramatic otherworldly sweeps,



This piece is dedicated to 'love that is fatal, irresistible, transcending everything, suppressing everything outside; joy that is superhuman, overwhelming, blinding, unlimited.'

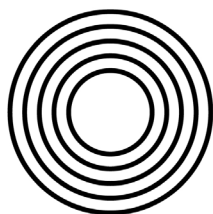
Olivier Messiaen  
Composer

the instrument has been used in many film soundtracks since its invention in the 1920s, from Berthold Bartosch's 1932 animated film *L'Idée* (The Idea) to the 1986 cult classic *Ghostbusters*. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's performance tonight is accompanied by an original film from the artists at 1927 Studios, which takes its inspiration from the golden age of silent cinema.

The symphony marked a departure from Messiaen's earlier style of writing. Up until this point, nearly all his music had drawn on his devout Roman Catholic faith, and his distinctive musical voice was rooted in the profound and supernatural. Having studied composition in Paris, he wrote extensively for the church organ and was appointed organist at Église de la Sainte-Trinité in 1931; a position he held for over 60 years. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Messiaen was drafted into the French army as a medical auxiliary and was captured in June 1940. He spent nine months at a prisoner-of-war camp in Görlitz, Germany, before his organ teacher, Marcel Dupré, successfully petitioned for his release. It was here that Messiaen wrote one of his most celebrated works, *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the End of Time), which he performed in the camp with three other captive musicians.

The quartet is the epitome of his earlier style: intimate, reflective, and deeply spiritual. In contrast, the *Turungalîla-symphonie*, written just a few years later, is extroverted, radiant, and brimming with energy. The symphony is part of a trilogy of his post-war pieces (alongside *Harawi* and *Cinq rechants*) which drew their inspiration not from religion, but from the emotionally charged, tragic love story of Tristan and Isolde, perhaps most famously depicted in Richard Wagner's opera written almost a century earlier. Messiaen focuses on representing the intense emotions of the ill-fated lovers in his music.

In December 1949, the ageing Koussevitzky was too unwell to conduct the first performance of Messiaen's *Turungalîla-symphonie*, and the responsibility fell to his young protégé Leonard Bernstein, who would go on to become one of the USA's most celebrated musicians. The reviews were mixed. One critic writing for the *Boston Globe* made it clear that Messiaen's 'gigantic and ear-blasting new symphony' was not to the taste of some of the regular concertgoers, noting that 'by the time the second half began, a good many of the Friday afternoon subscribers had departed'. Despite this, Koussevitzky was thrilled with the new piece, which has since established itself as one of the most awe-inspiring and exhilarating pieces written for orchestra.



# ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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## VIOLIN I

Lisanne Soeterbroek  
Tamás András  
Janice Graham  
Esther Kim  
Lauren Bennett  
Savva Zverev  
Andrew Klee  
Kay Chappell  
Anthony Protheroe  
Erik Chapman  
Adriana Iacovache-Pana  
Rosemary Wainwright  
Judith Templeman  
Imogen East  
Eriko Nagayama  
Catherine Haggo

## VIOLIN II

Andrew Storey  
Elen Hâf Rideal  
Jennifer Christie  
Charlotte Ansbergs  
Jennifer András  
Peter Graham  
Stephen Payne  
Manuel Porta  
Inês Soares Delgado  
Sali-Wyn Ryan  
Leonardo Jaffe  
Susie Watson  
Emanuela Buta  
Daniel Meyer

## VIOLA

Abigail Fenna  
Wenhan Jiang  
Liz Varlow  
Joseph Fisher  
Anna Grows

Triona Milne  
Ugne Tiškutė  
Jill Valentine  
Esther Harling  
Jonathan Hallett  
Rebecca Carrington  
Samantha Hutchins

## CELLO

Rosie Biss  
Jonathan Ayling  
Chantal Woodhouse  
Roberto Sorrentino  
Jean-Baptiste Toselli  
Rachel van der Tang  
Anna Stuart  
Emma Black  
George Hoult  
Alessandro Sanguinetti

## DOUBLE BASS

Jason Henery  
Gareth Sheppard  
David Gordon  
Ben Wolstenholme  
Joe Cowie  
Cathy Colwell  
Lewis Reid  
Guillermo Arealos

## FLUTE

Emer McDonough  
Joanna Marsh

## PICCOLO

Diomedes Demetriades

## OBOE

James Hulme  
Henrietta Cooke

## COR ANGLAIS

Patrick Flanagan

## CLARINET

Katherine Lacy  
Sonia Sielaff

## BASS CLARINET

Laurent Ben Slimane

## BASSOON

Richard Ion  
Ruby Collins  
Fraser Gordon

## HORN

Ben Hulme  
Kathryn Saunders  
Daniel Curzon  
Finlay Bain  
Zoë Tweed

## TRUMPET

Matthew Williams  
Kaitlin Wild  
Mike Allen  
Toby Street  
David Geoghegan

## TROMBONE

Matthew Gee  
Thomas Berry

## BASS TROMBONE

Josh Cirtina

## TUBA

Peter Smith

## PERCUSSION

Stephen Quigley  
Martin Owens  
Gerald Kirby  
Richard Horne  
Feargus Brennan  
Gillian McDonagh  
Rebecca Celebuski  
Barnaby Archer  
Elsa Bradley  
Kevin Earley

## CELESTE

Ben Dawson

## KEYED

GLOCKENSPIEL  
Iain Clarke

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## FIND OUT MORE

- ▶ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
- ▶ Vasily Petrenko
- ▶ Steven Osborne
- ▶ Cécile Lartigau
- ▶ 1927 Studios
- ▶ southbankcentre.co.uk



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THE EVENTS IN MULTITUDES