



# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## MULTITUDES SYMPOESIA

Thursday 30 April 2026, 7.30pm | Queen Elizabeth 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 London Sinfonietta

Tonight's event sees the worlds of poetry and classical music meet, with two Southbank Centre residents collaborating on stage for the first time.

Running since 2012, and resident at the Southbank Centre since 2019, Out-Spoken is London's premiere poetry night. It prides itself for its innovation – being right at the cutting edge of the genre; celebrating established poets and playing its part in the launch of new ones, and frequently integrating music into its events.

The London Sinfonietta, one of the Southbank Centre's six Resident Orchestras, is in many ways a natural partner – specialising in contemporary music, it, like Out-Spoken, is a groundbreaking organisation, having premiered over 450 pieces of music since it was founded in 1968, making new music relevant to wider society and engaging in contemporary issues. The ensemble is also no stranger to collaboration across art forms, in last year's *Multitudes* festival partnering with the dance company Sasha Waltz & Guests.

Tonight Out-Spoken and the London Sinfonietta join forces for an unflinching meditation and reflection upon current world events, a night that promises to pull no punches.

### MUSIC

Max Richter <i>Europe, after the rain</i>	6 mins
Messiaen <i>Tangle of Rainbows</i> from <i>Quartet for the End of Time</i>	8 mins
Courtney Bryan <i>Elegy</i>	10 mins
Steve Reich <i>After the War</i> from <i>Different Trains</i>	11 mins
Thomas Adès <i>O Albion</i> from <i>String Quartet No.1, Op.12 (Arcadiana)</i>	3 mins

### CREATIVE TEAM

#### London Sinfonietta

Jonathan Morton *violin I* \*  
Freya Goldmark *violin II*  
Fiona Winning *viola*  
Tim Gill *cello* \*  
Mark van de Wiel *clarinet* \*  
Joseph Havlat *piano*

Joelle Taylor *poet*

Anthony Anaxagorou *poet*

Salena Godden *poet*

Jay Bernard *poet*

\* London Sinfonietta Principal Players

## SYMPOESIA

Why do you care?  
There's nothing you can do about it.  
Why this, not that?  
What are you gonna do about it?

Tonight's event is described as containing 'urgent storytelling' and a conversation with poets Joelle Taylor and Anthony Anaxagorou reveals just how urgent, with it being built around these questions and statements in relation to current world events.

'Everything begins with language... everything begins with a word', says Taylor, and that 'everything' includes ongoing global crises and genocides, whether in Sudan, Gaza or Iran, which tonight spotlights.

'One of our contentions is that the arts in this country... have kind of shied away, for various reasons, of calling a thing what it is. And so, language has become really important in how it deals with a lot of the atrocities that we've been seeing.'

Tonight's event doesn't shy away from these issues, instead it deals with them head-on. Perhaps not something that classical music is known for, but it's relatively familiar territory for the Southbank Centre's resident poetry night, Out-Spoken, whose events often engage in politics and the realities of everyday life.

Engaging with pressing current day issues is perhaps not such a constant in classical music, and the lazy stereotype might be that it's an art form a million miles away from innovation, but Taylor had no hesitation in taking up the idea of a collaboration when the call came from Southbank Centre.

'The reality is that classical music is profoundly affecting and incredibly moving... it's kind of a natural partnership.'

Anaxagorou also goes on to talk about how he and Taylor hope that events like tonight's might help to 'reclaim' art forms like poetry and classical music: '...working with classical music, it goes back to that thing of high culture, and what's themed as high culture, right? And I think poetry also has an elitist kind of public-facing reputation.'

For Anaxagorou, Out-Spoken and this collaboration with the world of classical music is about allowing people, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, to be able to reclaim that narrative.

'You know, Classic FM is free. You can just put Classic FM on the radio and listen to classical music for free. You can read *The Wasteland* for free. There's just so much access to free things. This idea that you have to be rich, or you have to be well educated, or you have to have loads of letters after your name, all of this kind of stuff, is just nonsense.'

Far from being scared of Out-Spoken's often direct approach to contemporary issues, for Andrew Burke,



'The reality is that classical music is profoundly affecting and incredibly moving... it's kind of a natural partnership'

Joelle Taylor

Poet

Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the London Sinfonietta, it was one of the things that attracted him to the collaboration – plus, as an organisation that collaborates frequently, working with a new art form is always a fascinating opportunity.

'When you work with artists from other art forms, you realise everybody's tuned slightly differently as to which sense they use the most. I find it very curious for dancers, for instance, that they feel tempo or pulse in very different way to musicians... and that sometimes goes across the bars of a piece of music, which is fun.'

'With poets, I found Out-Spoken to be absolutely focussed on the meaning of what they're trying to communicate, obviously, and the power of their message, and Out-Spoken particularly, are a very socially or social-issue engaged people. They're prepared to face the real world head-on and not pull their punches.'

At the time of writing, quite how tonight will unfold is unknown, it's something that will be developed in rehearsals. It's clear that all parties know what they don't want – for music not to become an aural wash behind the poetry, nor for it to be a stop and start, a lasagne of music then poetry then music. As Burke says: 'some of the music we've chosen definitely needs to be heard. So you can't speak over it.'

With the London Sinfonietta being no stranger to cross-genre collaborations, Burke was immediately aware of the balance that needs to be struck: 'at the heart of it was the curiosity I had, to find out whether and how we could make it work. How can we value the words, and make sure they're heard and understood while also finding music, which needs to be heard, and doesn't get spoken over, or used as background music, or as sound effects?... We knew we didn't want to have an evening which was a bit of music, a bit of poetry, a bit of music. We wanted to get this kind of dramaturgical arc to the evening, where there was a shape and flow and a direction to it.'

The music that Burke has chosen, in collaboration with tonight's poets, encompasses the whole range of the London Sinfonietta's repertoire, which spans the 20th century and contemporary works. There's the seventh movement of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, written while the composer was a prisoner of war in German captivity. With its themes of revelation and transcendence, it's a piece that's powerfully relevant to tonight's subject matter. A piece related in content is *Different Trains*, from which we hear the third movement, titled 'After the War'. This piece, by Steve Reich, reflects on the composer's experience, as a Jew, in riding trains in the USA, and reflects on the comparable experience of fellow Jews, riding trains for very different reasons in wartime Europe.

Max Richter's *Europe, After the Rain* takes the same title as a surrealist painting by Max Ernst, *Europe After the Rain II*, depicting a devastated, post-apocalyptic landscape, a piece described by Burke as 'beautifully reflective'. Courtney Brian's *Elegy* is a response to 'Strange Fruit', a song made famous by Billie Holliday, and seeks to honour the spirits of the victims of racial violence both of the past and the present. Finally there is *O Albion* by Thomas Adès, part of a larger piece of music that evokes vanished and imaginary idylls – 'Albion' here being an ancient name for Great Britain.

Programme notes © William Norris, 2026



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#### FIND OUT MORE

- ▶ London Sinfonietta
  - ▶ Out-Spoken
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](https://southbankcentre.co.uk)