

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

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Contact: Alex Kemsley, Press Manager (Music) alex.kemsley@southbankcentre.co.uk

Press view: Friday 11 September 2026, 11am and 12 noon

Images: [HERE](#)

Behind the scenes film: [HERE](#)

The Southbank Centre presents the UK premiere of *Playing With Fire: An Immersive Odyssey with Yuja Wang*

The mixed-reality classical music experience places audiences inside the performance of one of the world's greatest pianists and a visual expression of the classical music that inspires her



This autumn, the **Southbank Centre** unveils the UK premiere of ***Playing With Fire: An Immersive Odyssey with Yuja Wang***, a major new mixed-reality experience and bold expansion of the piano recital, written and directed by Pierre-Alain Giraud. Combining live recital, visual art, mixed reality and virtual reality technologies with spatialised sound, the production places classical music in striking dialogue with virtual worlds, allowing an unprecedented perspective on the performance of one of the world's greatest living pianists.

Running at the Royal Festival Hall from **9 September 2026 to 3 January 2027** as part of the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary year, *Playing with Fire* invites audiences to step inside a series of visual environments and precisely crafted sound worlds, shaped around the artistry of internationally acclaimed and Grammy Award-winning pianist **Yuja Wang**.

Produced by experiential arts collaborators **VIVE Arts** and **Atlas V**, the experience uses state-of-the-art volumetric capture to place visitors inside Wang's recorded performance at a Steinway Spirio player piano. With **VIVE Focus Vision** headsets, audiences can move freely around her, encountering the thrill of a close encounter with Yuja Wang's performance impossible in a concert hall, observing her virtuosity, precision and the exuberance of her playing.

Seamlessly shifting between mixed reality and virtual reality depending on the audience member's proximity to the piano, the installation creates an unprecedented kind of emotional and sensory

closeness to Yuja's performance. Yuja Wang's personally curated repertoire spans composers including Debussy, Ravel, Bach, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, forming a musical and visual journey through the many facets of fire as a symbol of human creativity. Visual environments transform in response to the music – serene night skies, molten primordial forms and dreamlike waterscapes – while fragments of Paul Verlaine's poetry deepen the introspective atmosphere and chart pivotal moments of emotional development.

Yuja Wang, lead artist, said: *"Music is energy, and it is curiosity that drove me to discover what can be created when all senses are stimulated with technology. To be able to fuse art and technology with this new immersive installation is really a dream come true. The result is a synergy that is the simulacrum of being fully alive as a human. With the enclosure of the headset, we enter our own intimate space — yet still connected to others — understanding the evolution of humanity, its rituals, its cosmic divinities. As Baudelaire wrote: "Through the unknown, we renew" (Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau)."*

Pierre-Alain Giraud, writer, director & visual director, said: *"Working with Yuja Wang has been both an honor and a joy. She shatters all preconceptions about classical music and embodies everything that the greatest music can be – vibrant, bold, universal. Through Playing With Fire, we create an experience that matches her spirit: using cutting-edge technology not as a gimmick, but as a way to reveal how each piece connects to our universal human stories. This project extends my 15-year collaboration with Icelandic artist Gabriela Friðriksdóttir, whose surrealist paintings of fire, water and organic forms provide the perfect visual language for our journey, combining mixed reality with the physical presence of a Steinway piano and Yuja's extraordinary performance."*

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, said: *"As we continue the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary year, Playing With Fire reflects our ongoing ambition to bring audiences closer to the transformative power of classical music, honouring the depth of the classical canon while exploring new ways of experiencing it. Since opening in 1951, we've welcomed generations of musical innovators into our concert halls, and this mixed-reality work continues that legacy by connecting the virtuosity of Yuja Wang's performance with the creative possibilities of today, bringing audiences expansive and multi-disciplinary approaches to the classical music experience."*

Written and directed by film and immersive director Pierre-Alain Giraud (winner of the Best Immersive Work Award at Cannes 2024), with visual design by Gabriela Friðriksdóttir and spatial audio by Nicolas Becker, the installation offers a rare opportunity to encounter one of the world's leading pianists up close, within a richly textured mixed-reality world.

Celina Yeh, Executive Director of VIVE Arts, said, *"VIVE Arts' mission is to support groundbreaking projects where immersive technologies open new dimensions of artistic engagement. Playing With Fire not only showcases technical innovation, but channels it into a powerful, intimate encounter with the creative process of one of the world's most prodigious performers. Yuja's expressive range, unparalleled technical virtuosity and electrifying stage presence make her the ideal artist for this kind of exploration, where performance, spatial computing, immersive sound and lush visual storytelling converge to allow audiences to experience music viscerally as it's felt from the inside out, expanding the possibilities of how we engage with performance."*

Playing With Fire is produced by VIVE Arts and Atlas V, in collaboration with production partner Lightroom, and is supported by Steinway & Sons, the CNC (Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée) and Pictanovo.

Tickets for *Playing With Fire* (9 Sep 2026 – 3 Jan 2027 at the Royal Festival Hall's Spirit Level, Level 1) are on sale now from £26.

To celebrate the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary, a limited allocation of 750 tickets is available for £13.50 for performances between Thursday 10 and Sunday 27 September, subject to availability. www.southbankcentre.co.uk

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors:

Please note that Playing with Fire does not feature Yuja Wang in person. The experience is a virtual concert featuring a pre-recorded avatar of Yuja and her recital, presented in an immersive environment.

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Playing With Fire repertoire:

Maurice Ravel, *Jeux d'eau*

Claude Debussy, *Bruyeres*

Igor Stravinsky, 'Danse Infernal' from *The Firebird*, in the piano transcription by Guido Agosti

Johann Sebastian Bach, *Choral Prelude "I call upon you, Lord Jesus Christ"*

Franz Liszt, *Feux Follets*

Claude Debussy, *Clair de Lune*

Sergei, Prokofiev, *War Sonata No. 7*

Johannes Brahms, *Three Intermezzi, Op. 117*

Frederic Chopin, *Waltz in C-sharp minor, Op. 64, No. 2*

Produced by VIVE Arts and Atlas V, in collaboration with production partner Lightroom.

Performer: Yuja Wang

Writer, director & creative director: Pierre-Alain Giraud

Creative director & original artwork: Gabriela Friðriksdóttir

Art director: Arthur Maugendre

Sound designers: Nicolas Becker & Antoine Martin

Lead developer: Sylvain Hayot

Scenographer: Laurence Fontaine

Lighting designer: Philippe Berthomé

Technical team: Studio Albyon

- Supported by Steinway & Sons, the CNC (Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée) and Pictanovo.
- Yuja Wang appears courtesy of Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft.
- As part of its ongoing collaboration with the artist, Lightroom conceived and produced a dedicated shoot and recording of Yuja Wang performing the repertoire featured in Playing with Fire on a Steinway & Sons Spirio piano in September 2024. These original recordings are used in the experience, and Lightroom is also developing a new project with Yuja for its large-scale immersive space in London.
- All artist performances recorded and played back on Steinway & Sons Spirio.

About Yuja Wang

Pianist Yuja Wang is celebrated for her charismatic artistry, emotional honesty, and captivating stage presence. She has performed with the world's most venerated conductors, musicians, and ensembles, and is renowned not only for her virtuosity, but her spontaneous and lively performances, famously telling the New York Times "I firmly believe every program should have its own life, and be a representation of how I feel at the moment."

Yuja was born into a musical family and began studying the piano at the age of six. She received advanced training in Canada and at the Curtis Institute of Music under Gary Graffman. Her international breakthrough came in 2007, when she replaced Martha Argerich as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Two years later, she signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon and has since established her place among the world's

leading artists, with a succession of critically acclaimed performances and albums. Her recordings have garnered multiple awards, including five Grammy nominations and her first Grammy win for Best Classical Instrumental Solo with her 2023 release of *The American Project*. For this she also won an Opus Klassik award in the Concerto category.

About VIVE Arts

VIVE Arts (HTC) is a global arts and technology initiative redefining how culture is created, experienced, and preserved through the power of digital mediums. VIVE Arts commissions, produces, and distributes groundbreaking immersive experiences in partnership with world-class artists and institutions—expanding creative possibilities for artists and enabling institutions to animate cultural heritage in bold new ways that reach wider audiences. With unmatched expertise in the arts, culture, and technology, VIVE Arts empowers artists and institutions to harness immersive arts and technologies. This opens new modes of storytelling, experimentation, and exhibition and fosters a dynamic ecology for digital innovation in the arts, from creation through to distribution. Since its founding in 2017, VIVE Arts has realized more than 75 projects worldwide and stands at the forefront of advancing culture through technology. Visit vivearts.com and follow us on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

About Atlas V

ATLAS V was founded in 2017 at the intersection of storytelling, technological innovation, and audiovisual production. Bringing together these disciplines, the company has grown into a pioneering immersive media group that oversees the entire creative chain—from concept development to global distribution.

From interactive VR and AR experiences to immersive exhibitions, ATLAS V seeks to engage audiences through cutting-edge technologies, bold visual aesthetics, and innovative design. ATLAS V's productions have earned international acclaim, winning awards at leading festivals such as Sundance, Tribeca, Venice, and Annecy, and receiving honors such as the Webby Awards, Annie Awards, and Emmy Awards.

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project – that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal communities and should be available and accessible to everyone – are still our guiding principles today. The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), two resident organisations (Kinetika Bloco and Tomorrow's Warriors) and six resident orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra). www.southbankcentre.co.uk