



SOUTHBANK CENTRE

MULTITUDES INFERNO

Wednesday 29 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

Tonight's event brings together contemporary British artist Mat Collishaw and the ever-inventive BBC Concert Orchestra. Mat Collishaw is a major figure in the generation of artists that emerged from Goldsmiths College in the late 1980s as part of the Young British Artists circle, who has gone on to have international acclaim with his work exhibited worldwide. Tonight's collaboration is his second meeting with classical music, his first being *Sky Burial*, a meditation on death and nature, which accompanied a live performance of Fauré's *Requiem*. Of his collaborations with classical music, Collishaw has said: 'It's so powerful. If I can create something on top of that, which takes people to another place, I hope it might make classical music more inviting for people who wouldn't normally go'.

Tonight's performance has as its focus one of the most polarising pieces of classical music, Liszt's *Dante Symphony*, a piece which has a reputation as being a bit 'marmite' (you love it or hate it), with Collishaw using the work to illustrate one of today's most pressing issues, climate change and humanity's treatment of the environment. Themes from Liszt's symphony are explored by instrumentalists in the foyer of the Queen Elizabeth Hall to start the evening off, while a brand-new composition closes the evening.

Commissioned and produced by the Southbank Centre and BBC Concert Orchestra in the UK and Insula Orchestra, Paris and Pont Neuf, performing fine arts.

Generative AI video software was used by the film-maker in the creation of some of the show's visuals.

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

MUSIC

IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH FOYER, 7.05PM

Fiona Brice Visions of Dante: Liszt Remixed
(world premiere) 15 mins

IN THE AUDITORIUM, 7.30PM

Hildegard of Bingen O quam mirabilis est
(Oh how wonderful it is) 4 mins

F Couperin Le Rossignol en amour (The nightingale
in love) from Pièces de clavecin, Ordre No.14 6 mins

Messiaen L'alouette calandrelle (The greater
short-toed lark) from Catalogue d'oiseaux
(Catalogue of birds) 5 mins

Liszt Dante Symphony, S.109 50 mins

Fiona Brice My Precious Fool with lyrics by TaliaBle
(world premiere) 8 mins

CREATIVE TEAM

BBC Concert Orchestra

Jérôme Kuhn *conductor*

Mishka Rushdie Momen *piano/harpsichord*

Ileana Ruhemann *flute*

The Choir of Merton College

The Inferno Singers

Mat Collishaw *director, originator and film-maker*

Fiona Brice *arrangement and new compositions*

BBC Concert Orchestra *additional music direction
and concept*

TaliaBle *lyricist and performer*

Ed Harcourt *additional audio production*

INFERNO

'When I go into a classical concert, I'm listening to the piece, but then I'm looking around. I'm looking at the violinist, and the horns and the percussion. I'm looking at the suits they're wearing, their hairstyles ... looking at everything ... And I find it very difficult to be in that moment, and just be propelled by the music, and absorb it as it is happening. And I find that when it does have a visual accompaniment, you just relax into it, and you feel the music rather than trying to overthink what it is that you're experiencing,' says Mat Collishaw.

If you've been to a classical concert before, you may know that feeling very well – the feeling of the mind wandering slightly, being distracted by small details whether on or off stage. And there's not necessarily anything wrong with it; for some, concerts can be their best thinking time, or their two hours of mindfulness for the week.

The idea of adding visuals to a concert, perhaps as Collishaw suggests, as an aid to visual concentration, always stimulates lots of debate, and is not a new one. Indeed, Franz Liszt (more on him later), originally composed his *Dante Symphony*, completed in 1847, with visuals in mind. He had hoped the music would be accompanied by a slide show of images from *The Divine Comedy* by the artist Bonaventura Genelli, together with a mind machine to simulate the winds of hell. Truly a 4D experience. The idea of music and visuals coming together is made clear by the work's alternative title, *A Symphony to Dante's Divine Comedy*, pointing to the fact that it was not initially supposed to stand on its own.

Nothing came of these plans, but the symphony's original concept as an immersive spectacle appealed to Collishaw, who realised that he could now deliver what wasn't possible 150 years ago, describing the discovery of the work and its original intent as an 'invitation'.

Let's rewind a bit though. Who was Franz Liszt? Born in 1811, he became the greatest pianist of his generation, a larger-than-life character who split opinion in musical circles. His fame and success (before Beatlemania there was Lisztomania) also led to many not taking him seriously – decrying him as being all self-promotion and no substance. In the mid-1800s, he turned his talents to composition, with the *Dante Symphony* eventually having its premiere in 1857. Written in two parts, the symphony is based on the poem *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, and depicts the journey from Hell to Purgatory.

Like its composer, the symphony splits opinion. Some see it as a revelatory masterpiece, while for some it's simply a hot mess of a work – the word 'problematic' gets used a lot. Frequent criticisms are that it's formless, or, not having a concluding movement, lopsided. For others, it borders on the blasphemous.

For Collishaw, who has curated tonight's performance, it's precisely the piece's bombast and emotional turbulence that drew him to it, and it seemed to fit with a theme that has been a thread through much



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Mat Collishaw
Artist

of the artist's work – that of the environment, our degradation of it and the crisis the planet finds itself in. In Collishaw's visualisation, Dante's descent is into environmental hell rather than theological hell, becoming a story about our malign influence on the planet. Purgatory, while ambiguous, offers a glimpse of possible redemption though technologies such as wind farms and solar power.

Liszt didn't write what would conventionally come next – the transition into heaven. Fellow composer Richard Wagner cattily suggested it was because Liszt's composing abilities would not extend to portraying the wonders of Paradise. Instead there's a closing section, a 'magnificat', traditionally a gesture toward transcendence – but in tonight's performance it unfolds as an ascent rather than a resolution; nature returning in quiet continuity rather than in triumph.

Tonight's performance contains more than 'just' the *Dante Symphony* however. Starting the evening off are a series of smaller, more intimate musical encounters, starting with *O quam mirabilis est* (Oh how wonderful it is) by Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), praising the creation of all things. *Le Rossignol en amour* (The Nightingale in Love) by François Couperin follows and evokes the bird's song, a symbol of love. In *Catalogue d'oiseaux: L'alouette calandrelle* (The Catalogue of birds: The greater short-toed lark) by Olivier Messiaen, the visual tension between humanity and the natural world first expressed in the prior piece is taken a step further.

Following the sweetly sublime ending of Liszt's monumental symphony and nature's quiet victory, we hear something brand new. Collishaw says: 'I wanted to go out with something that was a bit more challenging, something that left the audience reeling a little'.

Enter composer Fiona Brice. Her brand-new composition, *My Precious Fool*, re-works the music that has come before, and combines a driving beat with the words of rapper TaliaBle whose words read like those of a breakup song; describing how love and care was betrayed, exploited and abused.

Now it is payback time.

Programme notes © William Norris, 2026

BBC CONCERT ORCHESTRA

Wednesday 29 April 2026, 7.30pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

Anna-Maria Helsing *Chief Conductor*

Edwin Outwater *Principal Guest Conductor and Curator*

Jérôme Kuhn *Associate Conductor*

Barry Wordsworth *Conductor Laureate*

VIOLIN I

Nathaniel Anderson-Frank
Charles Mutter
Rebecca Turner
Chereene Price
Lucy Hartley
Cormac Browne
Rustom Pomeroy
Emily Earl
Maria Anastasiadou
Tayfun Bomboz

VIOLIN II

Michael Gray
Matthew Elston
Marcus Broome
David Beaman
Daniel Mullin
Iona Allan
Robin Martin
Antonia Azoitei

VIOLA

Timothy Welch
Nigel Goodwin
Helen Knief
Mike Briggs
Judith Kelemen
Julian Latham

CELLO

Miwa Rosso
Matthew Lee
Ben Rogerson
Pedro Silva
Anna Beryl
Bryony James

DOUBLE BASSES

Jason Henery
Stacey-Ann Miller
Lachlan Radford
Rupert Ring

FLUTES

Ileana Ruhemann
Sarah Manship
Sophie Johnson

PICCOLO

Sophie Johnson

OBOES

Gareth Hulse
Jessica Mogridge

COR ANGLAIS

Helen Vigurs

CLARINETS

James Gilbert
Katie Lockhart

BASS CLARINET

Derek Hannigan

BASSOONS

John McDougall
Jane Gaskell

HORNS

Andrew Littlemore
Tom Rumsby
Mark Johnson
David Wythe

TRUMPETS

Catherine Moore
David McCallum

TROMBONES

Matthew Lewis
Mike Lloyd
David Stewart

TUBA

Adrian Miotti

TIMPANI

Marney O'Sullivan

PERCUSSION

Johnathan Helm
Stephen Whibley

HARP

Anne Denholm-Blair
Rachel Wick

HARMONIUM

Ben Dawson

FIND OUT MORE

- ▶ BBC Concert Orchestra
- ▶ Jérôme Kuhn
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