



SOUTHBANK CENTRE

MULTITUDES THE RITE BY HEART

Thursday 16 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

Aurora's Creative Director, Jane Mitchell, introduces tonight's performance:

Ever since *The Rite of Spring* burst into life on a balmy Parisian evening in May 1913, it has delighted, shocked and thrilled audiences like few other works of art, rightly earning its reputation as a watershed moment in 20th-century orchestral music.

In the first half of this concert, James Bonas (co-director), Anouar Brissel (projections), conductor Nicholas Collon and I aim to delve a little deeper into *The Rite* in two ways. Firstly, using the freedom that comes with performing from memory, we will take apart some of the music, illuminating Stravinsky's shattering new approach to rhythm and gloriously colourful use of orchestration, all underpinned by a rich web of folk melodies.

Secondly, we will explore the rich context of the composition of *The Rite* and the subsequent 'riotous' premiere. Actors Karl Queensborough and Sarah Twomey deliver the words of Stravinsky and some of the other key characters involved in the creation of the piece: Sergei Diaghilev (who commissioned it for his Ballets Russes), Nicholas Roerich (who created the scenario for the piece as well as designing the costumes and set), Vaslav Nijinsky (choreographer) and Marie Rambert (movement specialist), among others. Nearly all the words these characters speak in our short exploration are directly taken from the wealth of archive interviews, diary entries and autobiographies.

Every player on stage this evening will agree that tackling this particular work by heart has been an enormous challenge, and feels pretty dangerous. But the danger is also part of the thrill, and the experience has brought us all closer to some of the risk that must have been felt by those players and dancers back in Paris in 1913. We hope you enjoy the ride!

MUSIC

A dramatised and musical exploration of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*

45 mins

Interval

Igor Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring*
(from memory)

35 mins

CREATIVE TEAM

Aurora Orchestra

Nicholas Collon *conductor*

Karl Queensborough *actor*

Sarah Twomey *actor*

Jane Mitchell *concept, script & director*

James Bonas *director*

Nathan Crossan-Smith *associate director*

Anouar Brissel *projections*

Lili Warden *lighting designer*

Elliott Stradling *lighting programmer*

Run time (approx.): 1 hour and 45 minutes, with a 20-minute interval

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)

The Rite of Spring

'The way Stravinsky writes for the orchestra in *The Rite of Spring* makes it feel like a terrifying single organism – or a machine,' notes Aurora's Creative Director, Jane Mitchell. 'It takes on its own momentum and feels unstoppable, and just when you think it's reached its maximum, the gears shift again in a way that is genuinely

frightening.’ Composed as the score for a new ballet by Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes company, *The Rite of Spring* was premiered in 1913 and has continued to astonish audiences with its startling complexity and force ever since.

Over his lifetime, Stravinsky gave various different accounts of the work’s genesis. He remained consistent on its intent, though, declaring the piece to be ‘unified by a single idea: the mystery and great surge of the creative power of Spring’. For Mitchell, the mounting political unrest of the era was also key to its creation: ‘I’m always struck that the piece was written two years before the start of World War One, and somehow it feels to me that it taps into that turning point, foreshadowing the catastrophe about to unfold. I think the impact of the work for the listener comes from this overwhelming sense of unstoppable power.’

Aurora first staged its memorised performance of *The Rite of Spring* in 2023. For Mitchell, the theatrical first half of the concert was conceived to ‘shed light on the incredible score. This project felt like such a unique opportunity to have the orchestra at our fingertips – the players would be able break things apart and show physically what is going on with the textures and rhythms and harmonies. I wanted to delve into how the score is built and let the audience feel and see what’s going on within the machinery of those hundred musicians.’

Aurora’s exploration of this internal ‘machinery’ is supported by Anouar Brissel’s projections and David Bishop’s lighting design. ‘We thought early on about how we wanted to demonstrate visually the colours and feelings of the story,’ recalls Mitchell. A key collaborator of Stravinsky’s was the Russian painter and set designer Nicholas Roerich, whose vibrant landscapes formed the backdrop to many Ballets Russes performances. ‘When I was researching their early work together, it became so clear to me that so much of Stravinsky’s inspiration came from paint and images. We wanted it to feel like the musicians themselves were conjuring these visuals and colours, so we came up with the idea of projecting video underneath the orchestra – so that the floor of the stage comes alive as the music is created.’

This sense of the production bringing Stravinsky’s music to life is key too for actor Karl Queensborough, who reprises his 2023 role tonight. ‘I’ve always been mesmerised by how music is constructed, but this production really transports you by sharing the narrative of Stravinsky’s life, what influenced him, the struggles he went through. And you can feel the energy of the players when they’re performing. There is an incredible sense of connection. In rehearsals I’ve sometimes become so transfixed I have to do a sudden intake of breath.’

For Nicholas Collon, Aurora’s Principal Conductor, performing in such a multi-dimensional concert is ‘a rollercoaster ride! I have conducted the work for over 20 years and have always enjoyed exploring the unusually rich context to this particular piece, but in preparing for



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Jane Mitchell
Creative Director, Aurora

Aurora’s theatrical take on it, I had to immerse myself even more deeply in every corner of both score and context. Whenever I finish the piece I feel a little shell-shocked, asking myself: what just happened?’

In terms of musical moments that might catch the breath, for Mitchell it is the arrival of the Sage. ‘It gets me every time because it’s SUCH powerful sonic storytelling. The Sage’s footsteps are inaudible at first – but they’re there – disrupting the machine without you knowing. Then as the Sage approaches, the rhythm of these footsteps become more and more powerful until they wreck the whole machine, as if some sort of internal alarm system has been triggered. I’d have to say it’s the most exciting moment in all orchestral writing.’

The intensity of the performance is heightened by each Aurora player learning the piece by heart. To accomplish this ‘I think every trick in the book is used!’ reflects Mitchell. ‘The musicians do all sorts of things they wouldn’t normally – putting words to rhythms, colour-coding scores, creating memory walks while listening to the piece, creating rhymes and tables and sets of numbers – the list goes on and on.’ For Mitchell, the work’s special complexity makes the impact of its memorisation even more profound: ‘rather than becoming risky and cerebral, it actually becomes instinctive and natural. Sitting in rehearsals in 2023, it felt like the orchestra were almost improvising the piece.’ Nicholas agrees: ‘We find a tightness in ensemble which means we can totally trust each other. We are all taking a giant leap of faith together.’

Programme notes © Kate Wakeling, 2026



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AURORA ORCHESTRA

Thursday 16 April 2026, 7.30pm | Royal Festival Hall

VIOLIN I

Maia Cabeza *leader*
Marcus
Barcham-Stevens
Alexandra Raikhlina
Tiberiu Buta
Ellie Fagg
Tom Aldren
Sijie Chen
Alexandra Lomeiko
Naoko Keatley
Michael Jones
Elise Scheurer
Colette Overdijk
Anna Caban

VIOLIN II

Jamie Campbell
Lonneke van Straalen
Tamara Elias
Will Newell
Bridget O'Donnell
Greta Mutlu
Gillon Cameron
Hannah Bell
Iona Allan
Alicia Berendse
Will McGahon

VIOLA

Miguel Sobrinho
Christine Anderson
Connie Pharoah
Hélène Koerver
Anna Barsegjana
Ruth Nelson
Lourenço Macedo
Sampaio
Raquel Bolivar Lopez
Kasia Ziminska

CELLO

Sébastien van Kuijk
Adi Tal
Ben Chappell
Charlotte Kaslin
Naomi Pavri
Kieran Carter
Yseult Cooper Stockdale

DOUBLE BASS

Ben Griffiths
Billy Cole
Lucía Polo Moreno
Martin Ludenbach
Marianne Schofield
Toby Hughes

PIANO

John Reid

FLUTE

Fiona Kelly
Emilia Zakrzewska

FLUTE / PICCOLO

Clare Jefferis

PICCOLO

Rebecca Larsen

ALTO FLUTE

Claire Wickes

OBOE

Thomas Hutchinson
Hannah Condliffe

OBOE/OBOE D'AMORE

Katie Bennington

OBOE/COR ANGLAIS

Katherine Bryer

COR ANGLAIS

Henry Clay

CLARINET

Peter Sparks
Massimo Di Trolio

CLARINET / BASS CLARINET

Max Welford

BASS CLARINET

Tom Lessels

E FLAT CLARINET

Emma Burgess

BASSOON

Jonathan Davies
Dominic Tyler
Ide Ni Chonail

BASSOON / CONTRABASSOON

Llinos Owen

CONTRABASSOON

Simon Davies

HORN

Annemarie Federle
Elise Campbell
George Strivens
Sarah Pennington
Hugh Sisley
Jake Parker
Fabian van de Geest

HORN / WAGNER TUBA

Andrew Budden
Joel Ashford

TRUMPET

Aaron Akugbo
Sam Kinrade
James Nash
Erika Curbelo

PICCOLO TRUMPET

Holly Clark

BASS TRUMPET

Jamie Tweed

TROMBONE

Davur Juul Magnussen
Benny Vernon

BASS TROMBONE

Simon Minshall

TUBA

Sasha Koushk-Jalali
Stuart Beard

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré
Francesca Lombardelli

PERCUSSION

Henry Baldwin
Jacob Brown
Laura Bradford
Heledd Gwynant

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