

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Jasdeep Singh Degun & Friends

Saturday 7 March 2026, 8pm

Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

We are proud to be a place where people come together to discover and connect with the wonder of classical music. Throughout the year, we provide unrivalled opportunities to encounter, live in person, the full range of music, and a variety of different ways for you to experience it.

Some of the world's most exciting artists, including our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists, join us to shine a light on this incredible art form. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2026.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Programme to include:

Jasdeep Singh Degun *Alaap*, *Veer*, *Abbha*, *Rageshri*,
2nd movement from *Concerto for sitar & orchestra (Arya)*
& *Lament*

Edmund Finnis Selection from *String Quartet No.3 (Devotions)*

Pēteris Vasks *Allegro energico (2nd movement)* from
String Quartet No.3

Performers

Jasdeep Singh Degun *sitar*

Harkiret Bahra *tabla*

Players from the London Philharmonic Orchestra
string quintet:

Marie-Anne Mairesse *violin I*

Mio Takahashi *violin II*

Sara Ramírez *viola*

Francis Bucknall *cello*

Tom Walley *double bass*

Let's set aside the well-worn, somewhat outdated ideas of fusion, crossover, 'East meets West', as they have little to contribute to tonight's concert. Instead, today's performance revolves around a musician immersed in both Indian and Western classical musics, so that aspects of both these distinctive and – yes – often contrasting traditions inform his creative personality, often intermingling on a fundamental level.

Jasdeep Singh Degun was born in Leeds to parents who had emigrated from India's Panjab state. He studied both Western classical music – singing in choirs and learning piano – and Indian classical music at primary school, and went on to study sitar extensively with Ustad Dharambir Singh from the age of 15. Both Western and Indian traditions have profoundly influenced his thinking and his creativity, but don't think of it as fusion: rather than simply combining elements cherry-picked from both musics, Degun instead creates music from a place where both co-exist, despite their different rules and ideas. The idea of harmony so central to Western music, for instance, is virtually absent from Indian classical music, while notation-driven Western classical music might be too constrained for the freedoms of improvisation so fundamental to musical expression in Indian classical music.

For Degun, however, these are complementary rather than contrasting ideas. He has talked of superimposing Indian and Western concepts, reimagining Western counterpoint using the principles of an Indian raag, for example, or bringing the repeating time cycles of an Indian taal into a Western sequence of harmonies. And he's done this and more in the wide-ranging works he's created for orchestras, opera houses, ensembles and individuals.

Tonight's concert reflects the richness of Degun's eclectic musical creativity, but also places his work within the context of other composers who – in their own individual ways – are also attempting to disregard outdated ideas of boundaries between musical genres.

After a traditional-style *Alaap* – typically the opening section of a North Indian classical piece, which slowly explores and unveils the raag – *Veer* forms the second track on Degun's debut album, *Anomaly*. It is written using the Indian classical

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.

raag *Charukeshi*, which is often associated with yearning, love and introspection, and a 14-beat taal or time cycle. Degun explains that he based the piece on a traditional folk song from Panjab, whose words explain: 'Ours is a flock of birds – we'll fly away'. The word 'veer' means 'brother' in Panjabi, with particular associations of courage and valour. Degun has dedicated the piece to the memory of his younger brother Taran.

Another piece with strong personal associations for Degun is *Abbha*, which was commissioned by BBC Radio 3 as part of the *25 for 25: Sounds of the Century* project. This ambitious scheme set out to mark the first 25 years of the new century with new works from 25 influential composers, each of whom homed in on a key moment from the opening years of the 21st century as inspiration. For his pivotal event, Degun chose the death of the revered sitar player Ustad Vilayat Khan in March 2004, not only because of the great musician's broad and continuing influence, but also because Vilayat Khan was the teacher of his own teacher, Ustad Dharambir Singh. Appropriately, the piece's title means 'father' or 'grandfather', and the work serves as a moving but also forward-looking tribute to the elder musician. It is rooted in the Indian classical raag *Gawati*, which is often associated with a bittersweet mix of happiness and sadness or poignancy. Though Vilayat Khan was himself deeply suspicious of cross-genre musical explorations – he would famously claim that 'fusion is confusion' – Degun aims to bring the traditional and the contemporary together in *Abbha*, both paying tribute to Vilayat Khan and exploring new creative pathways.

Rageshri forms another track on Degun's album *Anomaly*, and brings together not Indian and Western classical musics, but the two major forms within Indian classical music itself – the style from the north of the country (Hindustani) and from the south (Carnatic). It imagines the North Indian classical raag *Rageshri* as a South Indian Thillana – a fast-paced, rhythmic piece often used to bring a performance to a thrilling end.

In 2019, Degun composed *Arya*, a full-blown concerto for sitar and Western orchestra, to a commission by Opera North, whose Orchestra premiered the piece at Huddersfield Town Hall in February 2020. Its title is a play on words. On one level, it nods

towards the familiar Italian 'aria' as a solo sung piece, with the melodic line provided by Degun's sitar here standing in for the solo singer. But 'arya' is also a Sanskrit word with various meanings, including 'noble' and 'precious', 'valuable' and even 'diamond'. In that sense, *Arya* refers to the sitar itself as an instrument with a noble lineage and a precious place in the world's musical culture. The concerto as a whole serves as a mirror to Degun's own musical thinking: though the sitar and orchestra begin as antagonists, each with their own distinct and separate personalities, they ultimately find harmony and understanding while still acknowledging and celebrating their differences.

Following his sitar concerto *Arya*, in 2022 Degun collaborated again with Opera North on a full-scale opera, *Orpheus*, a beyond-the-grave collaboration with Claudio Monteverdi that reworked the earlier composer's 1607 *Orfeo* for our own times. *Lament* comes from just before the interval, and marks the death of Orpheus' wife Eurydice. It is based on the Indian classical raag *Sindhi Bhairavi* – considered appropriate for expressing high emotions – and is set to an eight-beat taal or rhythmic cycle. The original version for chorus and full orchestra has been arranged for sitar and strings by Ashok Gupta.

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2026

Find out more

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- ▶ [Harkiret Bahra](#)
- ▶ [London Philharmonic Orchestra](#)
- ▶ southbankcentre.co.uk

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Mat Collishaw's video installation reimagines Liszt's *Dante Symphony*, performed live by the BBC Concert Orchestra, with modern-day visions of collapse.

Papillons

Thursday 30 April 2026, 7.45pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Manchester Collective joins with dance-theatre company Thick & Tight and electronic music artist CHAINES for Saariaho's fragile yet fierce *Sept papillons*.