

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Bridgerton and Beyond with BBC Concert Orchestra

Friday 26 September 2025, 7.30pm | Royal Festival 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: Autumn/Winter 2025/26.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Kris Bowers Main theme & We could form an attachment from <i>Bridgerton</i>	4'
Offenbach Barcarolle from <i>Gaite Parisienne</i>	4'
John Lunn Downton Abbey Suite	7'
Celeste (with Stephen Wabel & Jamie Hartman) Strange arr. George Moore	4'
Davis Pride and Prejudice Suite arr. Mark Warman	16'
Dario Marianelli Pride and Prejudice Suite	4'
<i>Interval</i>	
Prokofiev Allegro (1st movement) from Symphony No.1 (Classical)	4'
Patrick Doyle My father's favourite from <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	5'
O'Hooley & Tidow Gentleman Jack theme arr. Fiona Brice	3'
Rachel Portman Closing titles from <i>Emma</i>	5'
Peter Brown & Robert Rans Material Girl arr. Fiona Brice	4'
Patrick Gowers Holmes in Europe & The death of Sherlock Holmes from <i>The Final Problem</i>	7'
Ruth Barrett Sanditon Suite	5'

Performers

BBC Concert Orchestra
Karen Ní Bhroin *conductor*
Alice Fearn *singer*
Nathaniel Anderson-Frank *soloist*
Sarah Walker *presenter*

This concert is being broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and will be available for 30 days on BBC Sounds



Co-produced by the BBC Concert Orchestra and the Southbank Centre.

*This performance lasts approximately 2 hours.
There is a 20-minute interval.*

'Dearest gentle reader, we've been apart for far too long. At last, London's smart set has made its return...' So wrote Lady Whistledown (voiced by Julie Andrews) in the runaway hit show *Bridgerton*. For this concert, London's smart set has congregated in the Royal Festival Hall, ready to be whisked away to the society balls and intimate drawing rooms of 19th- and early 20th-century England, where furtive glances behind fans, breathless dancing and pianoforte performances by young ladies – of varying degrees of accomplishment – were the currency of the age.

This is part of BBC Radio 3's long-standing and irresistibly joyful series, *Friday Night is Music Night* with the BBC Concert Orchestra, heralding the weekend in style (although Lady Violet of *Downton Abbey* was sufficiently unfamiliar with work to ask, 'What is a weekend?') The music with which we begin our entertainment was adapted from a piece called *High Adventure* by Charles Williams, who specialised in writing light orchestral stock music, composing scores for over 50 films as well as radio programmes.

Inspired by the books by Julia Quinn, the *Bridgerton* TV series is a Regency romp full of sex, intrigue and a certain knowing artifice, from fake flowers to classical arrangements of modern tunes. The original score was written by Kris Bowers – we hear the 'Main theme' and 'We could form an attachment'. Later in the programme come some of the show's arrangements of pop songs: Celeste's *Strange* (performed by Bowers in Season 1) and Madonna's *Material Girl* (featured in Season 2). The inclusion of pop in this context creates an immediate link between the experiences of those watching and those on screen, reminding us that they were dancing to the pop music of their day (and as Austen puts it in *Pride and Prejudice*, 'To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love'). Folk music arrangements were popular in the Regency period, similarly blending genres; arrangements by Beethoven and Haydn popularised numerous folk tunes, and Austen's Mary Bennet is described as being 'glad to purchase praise and gratitude' by playing 'Scotch and Irish airs'.

Bridgerton also features an array of classical works, among them Offenbach's 'Barcarolle' from *Gaîté Parisienne* and Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony. *Gaîté Parisienne* (Parisian Gaiety) is in itself a confection of arrangements: this 1938

ballet was choreographed for Monte Carlo by Léonide Massine, using versions of Offenbach's music by Manuel Rosenthal. Offenbach originally wrote his 'Barcarolle' for his final opera, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, in which it is performed as a duet called 'Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour' (Beautiful night, Oh night of love). A 'barcarolle' is traditionally sung by Venetian gondoliers, its gentle rhythm evoking the motion of their stroke. Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* (heard after the interval) is a 20th-century emulation of the light textures and conversational style of 18th-century music by the likes of Mozart and Haydn.

Written by Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey* charts the lives of the inhabitants – upstairs and downstairs – of a grand house in the early 20th century. Scottish composer John Lunn evokes the brooding drama and lighter frivolities of the plot, his Suite encapsulating the show's blend of sweep and suspense.

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is not sufficient. Jane Austen's 1813 novel of animosity evolving into love remains irresistible, spawning numerous adaptations and spin-offs. This concert contrasts two different musical approaches to the story. For the 1995 version starring Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet and Colin Firth as Darcy, Carl Davis drew upon the music of the era as inspiration, evoking Austen's contemporaries – especially Beethoven. The main theme playfully combines virile hunting horn-calls, elegant piano, and a waltzing meter that surges onwards with irrepressible momentum. Mr Collins is conjured up by pompous, fastidious music, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh by imposing, ominous gestures. The main theme is softened into tender, intertwining and increasingly ardent writing for 'Elizabeth and Mr Darcy', and there is a nod to the Mozart aria 'Voi che sapete' from *The Marriage of Figaro*, sung by Elizabeth at Pemberley.

Twenty years later, a film starring Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen was made, with Oscar-nominated music for piano and orchestra by Dario Marianelli – who also sought inspiration in Beethoven's music. The piano almost becomes a character in itself, acting as narrator. In this concert suite, it is initially heard alone, unfolding music of aching romanticism before the strings join in, adding a delicate backdrop to the piano's narrative.

Emma Thompson's adaptation of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, directed by Ang Lee, boasts a score by Patrick Doyle, from which 'My father's favourite' has become – well, a favourite. Marianne Dashwood plays the piece, moving her older sister, Elinor (played by Thompson) to private tears – until she is found by Edward Ferrars (Hugh Grant) and explains that this was her late father's favourite. It's a moment of vulnerability that deepens their burgeoning attachment. Marianne, meanwhile, has strong views on music as a means of connecting two hearts, declaring of any prospective suitors: 'the same music must charm us both.'

When writer Sally Wainwright happened upon the 2011 song *Gentleman Jack* by folk duo Belinda O'Hooley and Heidi Tidow, she knew she'd found both the closing theme and the title of her new show. Wainwright had been busy creating a programme about the adventures of Anne Lister, aka 'The First Modern Lesbian', who

defied the conventions of 1830s Yorkshire by dressing in what was considered masculine clothing, and embarking on numerous relationships with other women – including Ann Walker, to whom she was, in effect if not in the eyes of the law, married. Wainwright's working title was *Shibden Hall*, but she approached O'Hooley & Tidow about using their song, which also provides material for much of the incidental music.

Composer Rachel Portman made history when she became the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Original Score, for *Emma*. For this 1996 adaptation starring Gwyneth Paltrow, Portman combines delicate lyricism with folk elements to evoke the local dances around which so much of Austen's story takes place.

The rather murkier world of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* has been explored in numerous adaptations, with Jeremy Brett's portrayal of the detective, spanning 1984 to 1994, being among the most celebrated. Patrick Gowers composed the music to all the Brett series; we hear 'Holmes in Europe' and 'The death of Sherlock Holmes'. The detective was, famously, a violinist with a great appreciation of music. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr Watson describes Holmes returning from a concert: "It was magnificent," he said, as he took his seat. "Do you remember what Darwin says about music? He claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. Perhaps that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in its childhood."

Austen began work on *Sanditon* in January 1817, setting it aside, unfinished, in March; she died in July of the same year. A number of continuations have been made, including the recent series with music by British composer Ruth Barrett. *Sanditon* is set in a fishing village turned resort, and Barrett brings folk styles and instruments into her score to set the nautical scene.

And so our entertainment must draw to a close, dearest gentle listeners, and who better to summarise its delights than Austen herself, albeit through the mouthpiece of Mrs Elton in *Emma* – who, though speaking in her usual high-blown way, accidentally communicates something of value and truth: 'I am doatlingly fond of music – passionately fond ... without music, life would be a blank to me.'

Programme notes © Joanna Wyld, 2025

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