

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Alim Beisembayev in Recital

Saturday 7 June 2025, 7pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music has always had reinvention at its core. Throughout our programme, we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – capture that trailblazing spirit with works that broke the mould across the ages and brand-new approaches to timeless classics.

However you choose to experience the endlessly inventive world of classical music, we're so glad that you're doing it here with us. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2025.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

### Repertoire

D Scarlatti Sonata in D minor, K.213

6'

Ravel Valses nobles et sentimentales

16'

- I. *Modéré – très franc*
- II. *Assez lent – avec une expression intense*
- III. *Modéré*
- IV. *Assez animé*
- V. *Presque lent – dans un sentiment intime*
- VI. *Assez vif*
- VII. *Moins vif*
- VIII. *Epilogue: Lent*

Liszt *Après une lecture de Dante – Fantasia quasi sonata* from *Années de pèlerinage*

18'

Ligeti *Etude No.13 (L'escalier du diable)*

5'

*Interval*

Eleanor Alberga *Cwicseolfor (Quicksilver)*

9'

Chopin 24 Preludes, Op.28

40'

- I. *Agitato (C major)*
- II. *Lento (A minor)*
- III. *Vivace (G major)*
- IV. *Largo (E minor)*
- V. *Molto allegro (D major)*
- VI. *Lento assai (B minor)*
- VII. *Andantino (A major)*
- VIII. *Molto agitato (F sharp minor)*
- IX. *Largo (E major)*
- X. *Molto allegro (C sharp minor)*
- XI. *Vivace (B major)*
- XII. *Presto (G sharp minor)*
- XIII. *Lento (F sharp major)*
- XIV. *Allegro (E flat minor)*
- XV. *Sostenuto (D flat major)*
- XVI. *Presto con fuoco (B flat minor)*
- XVII. *Allegretto (A flat major)*
- XVIII. *Molto allegro (F minor)*
- XIX. *Vivace (E flat major)*
- XX. *Largo (C minor)*
- XXI. *Cantabile (B flat major)*
- XXII. *Molto agitato (G minor)*
- XXIII. *Moderato (F major)*
- XIV. *Allegro appassionato (D minor)*

### Performer

Alim Beisembayev *piano*

*This performance lasts approximately 2 hours including an interval.*

Most of Scarlatti's sonatas are fast and brilliantly odd; this one in D minor goes more slowly, but along a path that is no less curious. Phrases may be asymmetrical (in five bars at the start). A mirror will suddenly turn things upside-down. Figures that have become familiar pop up in new contexts. The form helps: how the whole first half is exactly repeated, then taken into a new atmosphere and again repeated. Scarlatti was writing for the Portuguese princess he served for half his life, but mostly, we might think, to make himself smile and wonder.

Ravel's dreams were often of distant times and places: the Vienna of almost a century before in the case of his *Valses nobles et sentimentales* of 1911. He found his title in Schubert, who published sets of *Valses sentimentales* and *Valses nobles*. The first two segments of Ravel's 16-minute waltz medley might suggest that noble and sentimental are going to alternate, but those that follow are not so easy to categorise in this way. Through links and contrasts they move towards a climax in the seventh number; the finale, then, is composed of memories. There is an epigraph from the poet Henri de Régnier, a near contemporary of Ravel's: '...that delicious and ever-fresh pleasure of a useless occupation.'

Liszt takes us from dream to nightmare in *Après une lecture de Dante* (After a Reading of Dante), which, as so often with him, was on his mind for years. He composed and twice recomposed it in 1839, then revised it again a decade later, to publish it a dozen years later still as a supplement to his second volume of *Années de pèlerinage*, comprising mementoes from Italy. The title he took from a poem by Victor Hugo spiriting up visions from Dante's *Inferno*. Liszt, who had read Dante before he read Hugo, does the same to begin with. However, the 18-minute work is, as its subtitle asserts, a 'fantasia quasi una sonata', and a reprise of the first hellish outburst leads into paradisiacal music that might be counted a sonata-form second subject. Hell comes roaring back, but the stars of heaven return to guide the music, though assailed, to a rousing positive conclusion.

Satanic forces, however, roar back in Ligeti's *L'escalier du diable* (The Devil's Staircase, 1993), the most imposing and alarming of his 18 études. Its stairs are chromatic steps, in scales that rise but are hobbled, as each scalar note is divided from the next by one or two foreign notes. After a page of this furious, driven but irregular music, the right hand terrifyingly breaks free, but is still bound into chromatic-scale figures. The inexorable upward stairways seem to be able to continue forever, because when one of them reaches the top of the keyboard another two or more will still have room ahead, but eventually both hands are crammed into the far treble and the uneven stepping stops.

Chords now appear alone, as if peering around in an emptied musical space, but the rule of upward chromatic motion soon reasserts itself and, despite the wild ringing of bells, the music returns towards its former condition, compelled to go on rising.

Virtuosity takes another direction in *Cwicseolfor* (2021) by Eleanor Alberga, who last year wrote her Piano Concerto for Alim Beisembayev to play as a Leeds International Piano Competition winner. Her title, she explains, is Old English for quicksilver, or mercury, 'the ancient spelling to be found in references to alchemy.'

'As a child,' she goes on, 'I remember being fascinated with watching mercury in a container, how it didn't adhere to anything and moved and changed direction rapidly. There was also an almost unbelievable brilliance on the surface of this stuff. *Cwicseolfor* is about that experience, and the piece mimics the qualities of unrealistic shine, non-adherence, and rapid changes of pace and direction. For the player it is highly demanding – always changing in mood, tempo and variation of material. I suppose the alchemy lies in transforming my childhood experience into a piece of music.'

And so to Chopin, who showed his admiration for Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* by composing, between 1835 and 1838, a whole collection of preludes without fugues. He takes a different route, not by chromatic steps but from major to relative minor and back to major up a fifth. Those relations allow the pieces, brilliant and fantastical as each of them is, to make a continuous sequence, where often a prelude will answer what came before, or sweep it away. These are 24 short stories – some of them very short – that make a novel, proceeding thus:

- 1: Broken chords open the sequence with bounding promise. The music seems ready to expand, but trails away, leaving the promise to be fulfilled in what follows.
- 2: What follows immediately comes from another world: startlingly chromatic, sombre, numb.
- 3: Vitality returns, and harmonic sunlight.
- 4: The simple gesture of a falling minor second becomes a poignant song.
- 5: In running semiquavers, the two hands jostle, half a beat out of step.
- 6: Another sad song, sung in the bass to pulsing accompaniment.
- 7: The opening, no more, of a mazurka.
- 8: Now that the sway between fast major and slow minor pieces has been broken, it is time for speed in the minor, beginning with a movement whose middle-treble melody sings between left-hand broken chords and high figuration.
- 9: Just 12 bars long, this majestic paeon sounding from the bass starts out in the major light and proceeds steadfastly into darker regions.

- 10: In clock time, this will be the shortest prelude, the right hand twinkling down to the left's melodic strains. Hans von Bülow, who gave all the preludes names, called this one 'The Night Moth'.
- 11: And this for him was 'The Dragonfly'. He had surely seen them hovering, wings flickering iridescent in the sun. For Alfred Cortot, however, the piece was 'A Young Girl's Wish'. We can call these pieces what we will.
- 12: Rapid repeating notes move in waves to create a *moto perpetuo* (fast passage with notes of equal length).
- 13: After three assorted fast preludes comes a long slow one, supported by left-hand quavers.
- 14: Turmoil, largely in the bass, soon done.
- 15: A quasi-nocturne, and one of the longest pieces, this has a chant-like middle section in the minor. Von Bülow's title – one that has stuck, 'Raindrop' – refers to the main music, with its regularly plashing quavers.
- 16: Semiquavers throughout make a nightmare swirl.
- 17: Also one of the longer pieces, this is another song, playing out its beautiful melody three times. Second time around, the music becomes more present; then it sounds from far away, punctuated by a tolling A flat.
- 18: The alternation between lyricism and violence continues, bringing a sudden agitated piece, stern and bare from the octaves between the hands.
- 19: Delightfulness and brilliance have been in the background a while, but not now.
- 20: Regular phrases, slow pulse, common time and a relatively common minor tonality combine to create the idiom of funeral march, one that stays only a short while before once again going into the distance.
- 21: This is another blissful song, but moving into stranger harmonic realms even than usual.
- 22: The outburst then of thundering passion may not be so unexpected.
- 23: Right-hand semiquavers shower the melody with light.
- 24: Again a longer piece, the finale has everything: brilliance, drama, melody, passion – and a scary close.

**Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2025**

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#### Find out more

- ▶ Alim Beisembayev
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)

## You might also like...

### Wayne Marshall

Saturday 28 June 2025, 7pm | Royal Festival Hall

The master of improvisation takes on Bernstein's *West Side Story* in tonight's programme, which also includes works by Andrew Ager, Roger-Ducasse and Schmidt.