

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Pavel Kolesnikov: The Colours of Mozart & Ravel

Friday 31 January 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: Autumn/Winter 2024/25.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

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### Repertoire

**Mozart** Variations on Gluck's 'Unser dummer Pöbel meint', K.455

**Mozart** Adagio from Sonata in F, K.280

**Mozart** Sonata in C, K.330

### Interval

**Ravel** Oiseaux tristes from Miroirs

**Mozart** Rondo in A minor, K.511

**Ravel** Une barque sur l'océan from Miroirs

**Mozart** Rondo in F, K.494

**Ravel** Menuet antique

**Mozart** Rondo in D, K.485

**Ravel** Pavane pour une infante défunte

### Performers

Pavel Kolesnikov *piano*

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

#### Variations on Gluck's 'Unser dummer Pöbel meint', K.455

13'	
7'	At first glance – or, more accurately, on a cursory hearing – the pieces created more than a century apart by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Maurice Ravel might seem poles apart. Despite Emperor Joseph II's legendary observation that Mozart's music had simply 'too many notes', it is of course Ravel who threatens to overwhelm the senses with glittering cascades and intricate keyboard figurations, exploiting the vast sonic resources of the modern piano far more bewitchingly than Mozart ever dared in his more restrained, compact creations, conceived for the pianoforte's more modest forebear. Yet there is a similar sense of focus and precision across both composers' music, of not a sound being out of place ('There are just as many notes as there should be,' was Mozart's famously curt response to the monarch's put-down), and of a laser-like clarity of meaning and intent.
18'	
4'	
10'	
7'	
6'	
6'	
6'	
6'	

Those qualities are clearly on display in tonight's opening piece. Mozart based his witty set of variations on a stand-out aria from his friend and colleague Christoph Willibald Gluck's 1764 opera *Die Pilgrime von Mekka* (The Pilgrims to Mecca), apparently first improvising the piece to honour Gluck at a 1783 concert before writing it out for publication in 1786. Through the course of his ten brief variations, Mozart manages to transform what's quite a plodding, serious-minded melody (sung by a pompous monk in Gluck's original, bewailing the stupidity of the man in the street) into increasingly brilliant flights of fantasy and technical agility.

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

#### Adagio from Sonata in F, K.280

Mozart was just 18 when he wrote what's numbered as his Keyboard Sonata No.2 in 1774, one of six early sonatas that he may well have used in the lessons he gave to the offspring of well-to-do families in his birth city of Salzburg. In the Sonata's slow movement that tuition was probably more focused on conveying mood and feeling than tackling technical difficulties: the Adagio is a spare, sparse and achingly mournful movement that employs sudden silences and daring dissonances to accentuate its emotional power.

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This performance lasts approximately 2 hours and includes an interval.

# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

## Sonata in C, K.330

- 1 *Allegro moderato*
- 2 *Andante cantabile*
- 3 *Allegretto*

We return to 1783 – the year of Mozart's improvised musical tribute to Gluck – for tonight's next piece. Like the Adagio we've just heard, the Sonata in C may have been intended for education. By 1783, however, the 27-year-old composer was feted as a keyboard virtuoso and accomplished composer amid the bright lights of Vienna, where among his keyboard students were children of the aristocracy. His new-found sense of freedom and self-determination is surely evident in the compact Sonata's confidence and focus. Its opening movement maintains a sense of airy elegance virtually throughout, while a darker-hued section in the minor intrudes into the middle of the otherwise song-like second movement. Mozart places great demands on his performer's left hand in his playful finale, in angular, leaping basslines and dashing accompaniment figures.

## Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

### Oiseaux tristes from Miroirs

*Miroirs* – literally 'Mirrors', or possibly more accurately 'Reflections' – is a set of five piano pieces that Ravel created between 1904 and 1905, each one dedicated to a different fellow member of the provocatively self-dubbed group 'Les Apaches' (The Hooligans) of forward-looking French artists. He was already a well-established figure in Parisian artistic circles, though he wasn't comfortable being labelled an 'impressionist' – it was a term that could be applied to his older colleague Claude Debussy, he felt, but never to himself. You'd be forgiven, however, for using that description for the two evocative pieces from *Miroirs* that we'll hear tonight, both of which paint vivid musical pictures of memorable scenes. 'Oiseaux tristes' (Sad birds) offers half-heard avian songs and calls, 'lost in the torpor of a sombre forest, during the hottest hours of summer', in Ravel's own description. A lone bird opens with a simple, repeated-note call, before blooming into a melancholy arabesque, but its song is soon offset by the oppressive heat from menacing harmonies lower in the piano's range.

# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

## Rondo in A minor, K.511

Three contrasting and seldom-heard rondos return us to Mozart again and again across the second half of tonight's concert – quite appropriately, in fact, since the rondo itself is simply a piece based around a theme that returns again and again. In the first of them, that theme is a particularly grief-stricken, even slightly macabre melody of remarkable emotional intensity (and of unashamed dissonances, too), which returns inescapably between brighter episodes and leads the piece to its resigned, even fatalistic conclusion. Little is known about the Rondo's background: Mozart dated it 11 March 1787 in his catalogue of works, and it's possible – like tonight's opening *Variations* – that it began life as an improvisation.

## Maurice Ravel

### Une barque sur l'océan from Miroirs

Swells surge and sunlight glints on vast expanses of open water in the second piece from Ravel's *Miroirs*, literally 'A boat on the ocean'. Size is important: this is a modest vessel – perhaps a small sailing boat, even a rowing boat – rather than a luxury liner, raised and sent tumbling by the immense power of the sea's crashing waves, which Ravel evokes with near-pictorial vividness in the surging ripples and cascading figurations of his piano writing.

# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

## Rondo in F, K.494

Tonight's second Mozart rondo originally comes from 1786, though the composer incorporated it – in a revised version – as the finale of his Keyboard Sonata in F, K.533, two years later. In contrast to the grief-stricken earlier Rondo, this one is generally sunny and cheerful, though its right-hand melodic line grows increasingly decorated as the piece progresses, building to a remarkable close that layers the Rondo's theme on versions of itself, builds to a flamboyant cadenza, and ends in the depths of the instrument.

## Maurice Ravel

### Menuet antique

The 20-year-old Ravel was a student at the Paris Conservatoire when he wrote the *Menuet antique* in 1895, though it's no mere academic exercise: the composer himself thought highly enough of the piece to transform it into an orchestral work in 1929. Indeed, it prefigures many of his later ideas, injecting distinctively 20th-century harmonies and ear-tricking rhythms into the elegant, stylised dance form known so well from the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, among many others.

# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

## Rondo in D, K.485

Our final Mozart rondo isn't actually a rondo at all (despite being called one by its composer). It dates from January 1786, when Mozart was putting together *The Marriage of Figaro*, and it counts instead as a more conventional sonata movement – though Mozart muddies the waters by using a single theme rather than the customary two contrasting melodies. In addition, he seems intent on devising ever more elaborate new settings for his perky tune, even taking us through a portentous passage in the darker minor before the piece's brighter, quieter sign-off.

## Maurice Ravel

### Pavane pour une infante défunte

We close with one of Ravel's most achingly beautiful and most gloriously simple creations. He was still a Paris Conservatoire student when he wrote the 'Pavane for a Dead Princess' in 1899, but dedicated it to the fabulously wealthy arts patron the Princesse de Polignac – née Winnaretta Singer, heiress to the Singer sewing machine fortune – at her Paris-based salon, which did his early career no harm at all.

But who was the Spanish infanta of its title, and why had she died? Ravel explained that the princess was 'défunte' simply because she'd lived a long time previously, describing his music as 'an evocation of a pavane that a little princess might, in former times, have danced at the Spanish court'. He went further: 'That title has nothing to do with the composition. I simply liked the sound of those words and I put them there: that's all.'

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2025

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