

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Wayne Marshall

Saturday 28 June 2025, 7pm

Royal Festival 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

Andrew Ager Toccata & Fugue in C, Op.30 No.1	9'
Roger-Ducasse Pastorale in F	11'
Schmidt Variations and fugue on an original theme (King's Fanfares from Fredigundis)	20'
<i>Interval</i>	
Wayne Marshall Symphonic improvisation in 4 movements on themes from Bernstein's West Side Story	30'

Performer

Wayne Marshall *organ*

Most big pipe organs are to be found in places of worship, often in positions of pride, as if this were their natural habitat. However, the cathedral organ does not convey the whole story. Not long after Ctesibius of Alexandria constructed the first organ, around 300BC, the instrument was being played at races and games, which was its purpose, too, for people in ancient Rome. And it returned to life outside the church around two centuries ago, when it became a regular feature of town halls and concert venues, even hospitals and department stores.

This is the organ as Wayne Marshall sees it and plays it: removed from religious function, sounding for its magnificent self. And this is the organ as it is understood by the three composers represented in the first half of this evening's programme.

Andrew Ager (b. 1962)

Toccata & Fugue in C, Op.30 No.1

Andrew Ager, whose Toccata & Fugue of 2009 opens events, is a Canadian composer and organist. Largely self-taught, he has become increasingly productive through the last three decades, focusing on songs and operas. Of tonight's piece, the toccata opens in C major but, as it whirls on, it slides and steps through keys until its C major close comes as deliberately surprising, and no less grand. Similar in length, the fugue sets out a wandering theme and is generally more restrained. Again the key centre is mobile, and so is the outline of the theme, until with great effort the music wrenches itself back to C major.

Jean Roger-Ducasse (1873-1954)

Pastorale

Jean Roger-Ducasse takes us back exactly a century, his Pastorale dating from 1909. He had studied with Gabriel Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire, gaining an admiration that matured into friendship as he joined his teacher on the staff there. He was also on friendly terms with Claude Debussy, whose saxophone rhapsody and other works he orchestrated. The Pastorale was his only organ piece, and he dedicated it to yet another of his friends, Nadia Boulanger. Better known

*This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.
There is a 20-minute interval.*

as a composition teacher, she was also an organist, though the first performance was given by the formidable Alexandre Guilmant at the 1910 founding concert of the Société Musicale Indépendante, established to provide a forum for the new music (by Maurice Ravel and others) that the stuffy Société Nationale de Musique was refusing.

Playing for about 11 minutes, the piece starts out in properly pastoral fashion with a lilting tune in F major having the character of a folksong or shepherd's piping. This is developed a while until, on a high flute stop, something like a bird song is heard, in preparation for an up-tempo section. The opening music comes back (it is never away for long), and a big development takes the piece to its climax. After that, Roger-Ducasse wonderfully sustains a long, slow aftermath of memories.

Franz Schmidt (1874–1939)

Variations and Fugue on an original theme (King's Fanfares from Fredigundis)

Franz Schmidt was not only a close contemporary of Roger-Ducasse but also in many ways a Viennese equivalent, relatively conservative in creative temperament but on good terms with those who were not. As a cellist he played in the court orchestra under Gustav Mahler, who is said to have wanted him for any work with an important cello solo. Arnold Schoenberg was another friend, and Schmidt even took part in the first performance of his *Verklärte Nacht*. In another parallel with Roger-Ducasse, he spent much of his life teaching at his city's leading conservatory.

Unlike Roger-Ducasse, he wrote a lot for organ, one of his earliest such pieces being his *Variations and Fugue on an original theme (King's Fanfares from Fredigundis)*, which he wrote in 1916, in preparation for what was the second of his two operas. The opera itself he based on the story of Fredegund, as she is known in English, a Frankish queen of the late sixth century. Gregory of Tours, writing the foremost history of the time, recorded her as murdering rivals, family members, bishops and even some of her own children, along with engaging in adultery and witchcraft. Though obviously biased, his account made her the ideal subject for late Romantic opera.

Schmidt's treatment, however, has not survived, except in the form of this 20-minute organ expansion of its fanfares, a work he revised in 1924. The work duly opens with those fanfares, in medieval-style D major with echo effects. After a first succession of variants, larger variations follow one another in an alternation, most often, of fast and slow. Much of the music is ostensibly in D major or minor, but the work is highly chromatic, in a bewildering of the senses.

After an initial slow, soft, contrapuntal variation comes a boisterous one having the muscular energy often on display here. The next variation is in calm running quavers, with fugal elements; the one after that begins with broken chords ornately opening out upwards and brings these back just before it closes. There is then a variation based on a very slow line in the pedals, with quiet wobbly accompaniment. Then comes a short entrance piece announcing the fugue, which occupies the final quarter of the work. Bursts of dotted rhythm arrive to further the drive towards a blazing finish in D major.

Wayne Marshall (b. 1961)

Symphonic improvisation in 4 movements on themes from Bernstein's West Side Story

Wayne Marshall devotes the second half of his recital to a symphonic improvisation on themes from *West Side Story*. Organists are, by tradition, skilled improvisers, and Marshall is astonishing in this field. Be prepared for tunes you know to be taken way beyond any expectation. Sit tight.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2025

Find out more

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A French music feast – Alkan, Debussy, Ravel – from a rising-star pianist known for her intelligent musicianship and winning new audiences through social media.

Mahan Esfahani: Byrd, Dowland & Gibbons

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A radical figurehead for the harpsichord brings to life beguiling music by some of the English Renaissance's greatest composers.