

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Alexandra Dariescu: Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite

Thursday 29 January 2026, 7pm | 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: Autumn/Winter 2025/26.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Klein The Child's dream, Op.8 No.1

Bach Prelude in B minor transcr. Siloti from
Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV.855a

Missy Mazzoli A map of laughter

James Lee III Humble birth

Beach Harlequin from Children's Carnival, Op.25

Price The Goblin & the mosquito

L Boulanger 3 Morceaux

Tailleferre Romance

Kashperova Songs without Words No.5

Filtsch Mazurka in E flat minor from Premières
pensées musicales, Op.3

Ciornea Romanian dance

35'

Interval

Tchaikovsky Selection from The Nutcracker:

Scene (Tchaikovsky)

Miniature Overture (arr. Esipoff)

March (arr. Pletnev)

Pas de deux in the snow (arr. Pletnev)

Dance of the sugar plum fairy (arr. Pletnev)

Tarantella (arr. Pletnev)

Arabian dance (Tchaikovsky)

Russian dance (Trepak) (arr. Pletnev)

Chinese dance (arr. Pletnev)

Dance of the reed flutes (Tchaikovsky)

Pas de deux (arr. Pletnev)

Waltz of the flowers (arr. Grainger)

40'

Performer

Alexandra Dariescu piano

*This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes.
There is a 20-minute interval.*

Tonight, I invite you into a very personal musical world.

The first half of the programme comes from *A Child's Dream*, music taken from my new album, released this week. These pieces trace my journey at the piano, from the curiosity and wonder of childhood to the music and voices that have shaped me along the way. They feel like small moments from a diary: intimate, honest and full of memories.

After the interval, we enter the magical universe of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. This music has been a dear companion to me throughout our beautiful world, embodying the joy, colour and storytelling that first drew me to the piano. Heard alongside *A Child's Dream*, it becomes a shared return to childhood: an invitation to reconnect with imagination, curiosity and the enduring power of dreams.

May this music awaken wonder, inspire courage and remind us that every dream, like every musical note, holds the power to shine for a lifetime.

Alexandra Dariescu

Music for children, or that evokes childhood, frequently draws from composers their most vulnerable and tender offerings, uncluttered by the wish for external validation that may come with more overtly complex works. In this programme, Alexandra Dariescu gathers together a number of pieces that have been of particular significance to her for much of her life, including music she played as a child, alongside what she describes as 'hidden gems by neglected composers' whose voices 'deserve to be heard'.

Encapsulating this journey into childhood – and repertoire rarity – is *Kindes traum* (The Child's Dream) by Emmy Schäfer Klein, the first of six pieces that make up Klein's *Christmas Album* Op.8 of 1882. Klein's reputation has been somewhat overshadowed by that of her husband, composer Bruno Oscar Klein, but this piece shows her aptitude for witty, taut and evocative piano writing.

The two volumes of JS Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* comprise preludes and fugues in every available key. We hear the Prelude in B minor, BWV.855a transcribed by Alexander Siloti, who studied with Liszt and Tchaikovsky, and was Rachmaninov's

cousin and best man at his wedding, conducting premieres of a number of his works. Siloti was an exceptional pianist and transcriber, and this dream-like interpretation of Bach's original is his most famous transcription. Rachmaninov wrote his *Moments musicaux* inspired by Schubert's pieces of the same name, and American composer Missy Mazzoli was influenced by the same source in her ticklish, tinkling piece, *A map of laughter* (2015), which is partly based on the fourth of Schubert's *Six moments musicaux*.

We stay in the US for the next few pieces. *Humble birth* is by James Lee III, a prolific and acclaimed composer who was born in Michigan, and was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, frequently building on the foundations of his faith in his wide-ranging music. Written for Dariescu, *Humble birth* is a piece that seems to shimmer with flecks and sparks of light. Hailing from Henniker, New Hampshire, Amy Beach was a child prodigy who from an early age could improvise vocal countermelodies and replicate four-part hymns at the piano, and gave her first public recital aged seven. Her piano studies blossomed with Dr Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, whom she married, but who curtailed her piano career – so she turned her attention to composition, teaching herself everything from fugue to orchestration. Beach wrote a number of works for children, including *Children's Carnival* Op.25 (1894), from which comes the playful 'Harlequin'.

In 1943 Florence Price wrote self-deprecatingly to the conductor Serge Koussevitzky: 'My dear Dr Koussevitzky, To begin with I have two handicaps – those of sex and race'. Koussevitzky ignored her but Price was undeterred, and by the 1930s she had become the most famous African American woman composer in the world. When Marian Anderson performed Price's *Songs to the Dark Virgin*, the *Chicago Daily News* hailed the occasion as 'one of the greatest immediate successes ever won by an American song'. *The Goblin & the mosquito* (1951) represents Price at her most light-hearted, with piano writing that vividly conjures up the whirring insect.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 galvanised 21-year-old French composer Lili Boulanger to help with the war effort; according to her sister, the teacher-composer Nadia Boulanger, Lili soon 'devoted herself to caring for wounded soldiers', as well as going on to found the Comité Franco-Américain du Conservatoire National, which provided support for musicians fighting in the conflict. This left Boulanger little time for composition – even for someone who had only recently become the first woman to win the Prix de Rome. She wrote four pieces in 1914, three of which are the *Trois morceaux*, later published in 1918. There is the enigmatic nostalgia of the 'Old Garden', the radiant 'Bright Garden' with its Debussian harmonies and textures, and the bustling 'Procession' of the final piece. Written a year earlier by a composer born a year earlier, the *Romance* by Tailleferre – the only woman included in 'Les Six', a group of (mostly French) composers – is a dreamy, youthful piece that shows Tailleferre's command of piano texture and harmony.

Leokadiya Kashperova was, like Nadia Boulanger, a formidable teacher as well as composer: she taught piano to Stravinsky (who was not kind in his description of her lessons, but also showed himself to be an unreliable witness on numerous occasions...). Kashperova was acclaimed as a composer during

her lifetime, with *The Times* praising her 'decided talent' in 1907, and *The Russian Musical Gazette* declaring in 1912 that: 'Her gifts as a composer are a most welcome phenomenon of St Petersburg's musical life'. Soon afterwards, she married a Bolshevik revolutionary and had to flee to Moscow. Kashperova's *Songs without Words* are all too rarely played today, but reveal the composer's intimate understanding of her instrument.

Two composers from Dariescu's homeland conclude the first half of our programme. Carl Filtsch was a Romanian child prodigy whose teachers included Clara Schumann's father, Friedrich Wieck, as well as Liszt and Chopin. Filtsch's talent caused such a sensation that Liszt apparently said of his impending tours: 'When that young man goes travelling, I shall shut up the shop'. Filtsch did indeed travel, including to London where a performance for Queen Victoria was a great success, but illness cut short his burgeoning career. The elegant, Chopinesque 'Mazurka' in E flat minor from *Premières pensées musicales*, Op.3, is indicative of Filtsch's great talent. Tudor Ciortea was a Romanian composer and musicologist whose teachers included Nadia Boulanger and Paul Dukas, and who in 1964 won the George Enescu Prize. Ciortea was particularly interested in folksong, as reflected in his spirited *Romanian dance*.

Following *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, Tchaikovsky was commissioned by the director of the Imperial Theatre, Ivan Vsevolozhsky, to compose a double-bill comprising one opera and one ballet. The opera came to fruition in the form of *Iołanta*, and for the ballet Tchaikovsky collaborated with Marius Petipa, with whom he had worked on *The Sleeping Beauty*, and who would go on to revive *Swan Lake*. Petipa put forward the idea of creating a ballet based on a version of ETA Hoffmann's tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, and gave Tchaikovsky very specific instructions as to how this should be reflected musically, including tempo and even the number of bars.

The story, simplified for the purposes of the ballet, begins at a Christmas party during which a young girl, Clara, is given a beautiful nutcracker, to the envy of her brother, Fritz. Clara falls asleep guarding the present, and dreams that it turns into a Prince who takes her to the Land of Snow and the Land of Sweets. It is in the Land of Sweets that the Sugar-Plum Fairy appears, dancing with exquisite delicacy; the Fairy then offers her guests an array of dances, some of which are included in this selection of pieces from the ballet, arranged for solo piano.

The Nutcracker was premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre on 18 December 1892, but the reception was adversely affected by the staging, and both choreography and the dancers themselves came in for scathing attacks. Yet Tchaikovsky's music shone through, and one critic summed it up when he wrote that it the work is 'astonishingly rich in detailed inspiration', and, 'from beginning to end: beautiful, melodious, original...'.

Programme notes © Joanna Wyld, 2026

Find out more

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