

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Alina Ibragimova & Friends: Messiaen & Shostakovich

Sunday 6 April 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

Shostakovich Piano Trio No.2 in E minor, Op.67 26'

Interval

Messiaen Quatuor pour la fin du temps 50'

### Performers

Alina Ibragimova *violin*

Marie-Elisabeth Hecker *cello*

Matthew Hunt *clarinet*

Cédric Tiberghien *piano*

This evening's two works could hardly be more different, and yet, both created in wartime winters, they are equal in how they rage, furiously dance and look for peace and solace.

### Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75)

#### Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor, Op.67

I. *Andante – Moderato – Poco più mosso*

II. *Allegro con brio*

III. *Largo –*

IV. *Allegretto*

Shostakovich began his Second Piano Trio in December 1943 and finished it the following spring. During this period, he lost his dearest friend Ivan Sollertinsky, to whose memory he dedicated the work. However, the trio, begun before the event, cannot be understood entirely as an outburst of personal grief. Shostakovich also felt for his country, which had at last repulsed the German invasion, but had suffered huge losses both among its soldiery and its civilian population.

The work opens under conditions of extreme strain: the cello, alone, playing a melody in very high harmonics. This is imitated by the violin below and then by the piano lower still. A kind of fugue develops, and stalls, to give way to a development of the theme against ostinato backgrounds at a raised tempo. The music speeds up again to take on the character of a folk dance, but slashed with more assertive and dissonant material. It all ends as if washing up on a beach.

Though properly in triple time, the scherzo has the aspect of a savage march. There is a short middle section, brighter, after which it's back to the dark drill of the scherzo.

The ensuing passacaglia could well be heard as a lament for a close friend. It leads directly into the last and longest movement, which begins dark and stilted, with pizzicato strings, suggesting a dance of puppets. Soon, the piano introduces the main theme, which has a klezmer-inspired Jewish character

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

and leads a rampage. (A notorious Nazi atrocity had occurred in 1941: the massacre of the Jews of Vitebsk.) There is an interlude, spookily quiet, before the music comes to a vociferous climax. Following a descent from this, the first movement's theme reappears. Then comes a grotesque return to the subject matter of this finale, ending in a memory of the slow movement that leaves the work not so much resolved as exhausted.

## Olivier Messiaen (1908-92)

### Quatuor pour la fin du temps

- I. *Liturgie de cristal*
- II. *Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps*
- III. *Abîme des oiseaux*
- IV. *Intermède*
- V. *Louange à l'Eternité de Jésus*
- VI. *Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes*
- VII. *Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps*
- VIII. *Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus*

Called up for military service in 1940, Messiaen was sent to join an army orchestra in Verdun, where he was taken prisoner with two colleagues: the clarinettist Henri Akoka and the cellist Étienne Pasquier. The three were transferred to a camp in Silesia, where they teamed up with a violinist who had been brought there earlier, Jean Le Boulaire, to create an ensemble that could entertain fellow prisoners and German officers. It was for this ensemble that Messiaen soon began composing his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, which received its first performance in a hut that served as theatre on 15 January 1941, under freezing conditions.

Messiaen took the subject from a passage in Revelation that, in his preface to the score, he abridged as follows: 'I saw a mighty angel, descending from heaven, clothed in a cloud, having a rainbow on his head. His face was as bright as the sun, his feet as columns of fire. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth, he raised his hand towards heaven and swore by Him who lives for ever and ever, saying: There will be no more Time; but on the day of the trumpet of the seventh angel, the mystery of God will be completed.'

The ending of time is conveyed in the music by various means: strongly repetitive forms, circling through the same instants; scales with repeating sequences of intervals, which dissociate chords from their normal functions of creating harmonic advance; processes of potentially enormous duration ('Liturgie de cristal'); and extremely slow tempos (the two 'Louanges'). At the same time, the text is addressed almost pictorially by vivid timbres and harmonies, and by the force the four instruments can exert together.

The eight movements run as follows:

I. **Liturgie de cristal** (Crystal Liturgy). The piano keeps repeating a sequence of 29 chords over 17 rhythmic values.

Simultaneously, the cello has a five-note motif repeating through another rhythmic pattern. The whole mechanism of musical cogwheels would take nearly two hours to get back to its starting point; the small portion Messiaen offers is celebrated by birdsong solos from violin and clarinet.

II. **Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps** (Vocalise, for the Angel who Announces the End of Time). The angel's song, sustained by violin and cello with 'rainbow water drops' from the piano, is encased in music evoking the heavenly being's might.

III. **Abîme des oiseaux** (Abyss of the Birds). The abyss is a frequent symbol in Messiaen of negation and death, while birdsong, still more commonly, is his image of spiritual joy, of participation in eternity. Here, the solo clarinet brings the two images together: the abyss in great crescendos, in arpeggios straddling the instrument's range and, in slow melody, the birdsong in lively flights.

IV. **Intermède** (Interlude). A scherzo, omitting Messiaen's own instrument: the composer rests to listen.

V. **Louange à l'Eternité de Jésus** (Praise to the Eternity of Jesus). Jesus as Word is praised by the cello, with piano. The marking is 'Infinitely slow, ecstatic'.

VI. **Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes** (Dance of Fury, for the Seven Trumpets). Messiaen describes this as the 'irresistible movement of steel, of huge blocks of purple fury, of abandonment frozen'; his preface also draws attention to how the four instruments together suggest trumpets and, later, gongs. The piece is based on a powerfully rhythmic theme, worked to a climax in which it is distended in time and register.

VII. **Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps** (Bunches of Rainbows, for the Angel who Announces the End of Time). There are references to the second movement, whose melodic and dynamic ideas are first alternated, then combined. Again, Messiaen's preface demands quotation: 'These swords of fire, these blue and orange lava flows, these sudden stars: here is the tangle, here the rainbows!'

VIII. **Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus** (Praise to the Immortality of Jesus). Under the marking 'Extremely slow and tender, ecstatic', the violin sings the praises of Jesus as Resurrected Man, as victor over time.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2025

---

### Find out more

- ▶ Alina Ibragimova
- ▶ Marie-Elisabeth Hecker
- ▶ Matthew Hunt
- ▶ Cédric Tiberghien
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](https://southbankcentre.co.uk)

# You might also like...

**Maya Dunietz & Friends:**

**Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou**

**Sunday 4 May 2025, 6pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall**

Multi-instrumentalist Maya Dunietz, with the London Sinfonietta's string ensemble, dedicates an evening to the sublime music of the Ethiopian composer and nun.