

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Kirill Petrenko opens the Biennale: Messiaen, Nemtsov and Hindemith

Thursday, January 14, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Kirill Petrenko, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MESSIAEN 1908–1992 <i>Les Offrandes oubliées</i>	
2	NEMTSOV b. 1980 <i>Antlitz</i>	20'
3	HINDEMITH 1895–1963 <i>Symphony: Mathis der Maler</i>	26'
TOTAL MUSIC		46'

Olivier Messiaen

1908–1992

Les Offrandes oubliées

ABOUT THE WORK

Les Offrandes oubliées (The Forgotten Offerings) is where Olivier Messiaen's career as an orchestral composer begins. He wrote it in 1930, aged 22, just after leaving the Paris Conservatoire, which he had entered at eleven and where his teachers included Paul Dukas. Walther Straram conducted the first performance at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris on 19 February 1931. Messiaen later recalled it as “my first work played by an orchestra and my first contact with the public at large”.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Cross. The piece opens with a slow lament for the strings, marked to be played with deep sadness. The melody moves in short groups of uneven length, which Messiaen compared to the “neumes” of plainchant, the small note-groups of medieval notation. There is no steady pulse to hold on to, and the line keeps sinking back into long, drawn-out notes that the composer called “mauve and grey wailings”.

The Sin. Without warning the tempo snaps to fast and the full orchestra enters. Messiaen described this section as a “race to the abyss” at an almost mechanical speed. Listen for the heavy accents that fall at the ends of phrases, the whistling slides of string harmonics and the sharp calls of the trumpets. The music drives forward until it simply breaks off.

The Eucharist. What follows is the heart of the work and the longest of its three parts. The violins play one long, extremely slow phrase that climbs gradually higher over a bed of very quiet chords. Messiaen heard those chords as “reds, gold, blues, like a faraway stained-glass window”. The music grows no louder and reaches no climax, and it ends by fading out at the top of the violins’ range.

Sarah Nemtsov

b. 1980

Antlitz

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Antlitz is a new piece, and these performances are its first. Sarah Nemtsov wrote it in 2025 and 2026 to a commission from the Berliner Philharmoniker Foundation, shared with the

Lucerne Festival and the Bayerische Staatsoper. Her own list of works gives it as a score for large orchestra lasting about twenty minutes.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

One detail of the scoring can be reported in advance. Alongside triple woodwind, full brass, harp and three percussionists, Nemtsov asks for an electric guitar, an instrument that appears in several of her orchestral works. It is worth listening for how it sits inside the orchestra, and for moments where it is hard to tell which instrument a sound is coming from.

In the concert the piece stands between two works that respond to religious images: Messiaen's meditation on the Cross and the Eucharist, and Hindemith's symphony on the painted panels of an altarpiece.

Paul Hindemith

1895–1963

Symphony: Mathis der Maler

26 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The Berlin Philharmonic gave the first performance of this symphony, under Wilhelm Furtwängler, on 12 March 1934. Furtwängler had conducted the premiere of Paul Hindemith's

Philharmonisches Konzert for the orchestra's fiftieth anniversary in 1932 and asked the composer for another piece. Hindemith was then at work on an opera, and he answered the request by shaping three orchestral movements from it into a symphony.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Engelkonzert (Angelic Concert). The first movement, which also serves as the overture to the opera, takes its name from the panel in which angels play music for the Virgin and Child. It opens with soft, luminous chords in G major. After a few bars the trombones quietly intone an old German song, “Es sungen drei Engel” (Three angels were singing), and the tune is taken up and built into a broad, hymn-like introduction. The main part of the movement is quick and bright, set going by the flute and the violins and worked out in busy counterpoint.

II. Grablegung (Entombment). A short, slow lament, after the panel at the base of the altarpiece that shows the body of Christ being laid in the tomb. In the opera this music belongs to the final act. The lines are spare, with muted strings and solo woodwinds, and the movement rises to one grave climax before sinking back.

III. Versuchung des heiligen Antonius (The Temptation of Saint Anthony). The finale is by far the longest movement and the most violent. The panel shows the saint attacked by grotesque demons. Hindemith begins with a slow, free introduction for the strings alone, like a recitative, and then sets off a fast movement of great force, with snarling brass and hammering percussion. Shortly before the end the storm clears. The woodwinds introduce the medieval chant “Lauda Sion Salvatorem” over rushing strings, and the brass answer with a blazing chorale of alleluias that closes the symphony.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-01-14-petrenko>

Version 1, 7 October 2026