

Rattle's Bartók and de Falla's Three-Cornered Hat

Sunday, January 18, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Sir Simon Rattle, conductor · Patricia Kopatchinskaja, violin · Rinat Shaham, mezzo-soprano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BARTÓK 1881–1945 <i>Violin Concerto No. 2, BB 117</i>	38'
2	BARTÓK 1881–1945 <i>Five Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Orchestra</i>	11'
3	FALLA 1876–1946 <i>The Three-Cornered Hat (complete ballet)</i>	38'
TOTAL MUSIC		87'

Béla Bartók

1881–1945

Violin Concerto No. 2, BB 117

THE COMPOSER

Béla Bartók was born in 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, then in the Kingdom of Hungary (today Sânnicolau Mare in Romania), and grew up to become one of the towering figures of twentieth-century music, and one of its great explorers. Trained as a pianist and composer at the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest, he was a formidable virtuoso who might have made his career at the keyboard alone. Instead, in the first decade of the century, he turned to the villages of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, later reaching as far as Algeria, recording peasant songs on wax cylinders and laying, with his friend Zoltán Kodály, the foundations of modern ethnomusicology. That fieldwork was not antiquarianism: the irregular metres, modal scales, and percussive vitality of the music he gathered passed directly into his own language, giving it a flinty rhythmic drive and an earthy modernity unlike anything in the Austro-German tradition he otherwise revered. Bartók loathed fascism: after 1933 he refused to give concerts in Nazi Germany and broke with his publisher there. As Hungary slid toward alliance with Hitler, he emigrated to the United States in 1940, settling in New York. The American years were hard, with failing health, financial anxiety and a sense of exile, yet they produced

38 minutes

the radiant Concerto for Orchestra (1943) and the Third Piano Concerto heard tonight. He died of complications of leukaemia in New York on 26 September 1945, his Third Piano Concerto all but finished on his desk.

ABOUT THE WORK

Bartók's Second Violin Concerto, written in 1937–38, is one of the great twentieth-century concertos. Composed on the eve of the Second World War as fascism engulfed Europe, it carries the weight of a farewell to the Hungary Bartók would soon leave forever for American exile. He wrote it for the violinist Zoltán Székely, a close friend and recital partner. There is a charming compromise at its heart: Bartók wanted to write a single-movement set of variations, while Székely insisted on a traditional three-movement concerto. In the end both got their way: the concerto has three movements, but the central one is a formal set of variations, and Bartók even based the outer movements on related material, so the whole work has a satisfying symmetry.

The concerto is a rich, generous, often lyrical work, fusing Bartók's deep roots in Hungarian and Eastern European folk music with the most sophisticated modern technique (including, here and there, flirtations with twelve-note writing, Bartók's wry comment on the serialists). It ranges from soaring romanticism to spiky energy to night-music mystery, all crowned by brilliant, demanding solo writing. Premiered in Amsterdam in 1939 under Mengelberg, it has been a cornerstone of the repertoire ever since.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens with strummed harp and pizzicato strings, like a folk minstrel tuning up, before the violin enters with a broad, noble, rhapsodic theme; listen for the music's swing between Hungarian-flavoured lyricism and fierce energy, for the eerie quarter-tone slides in the solo part, and for the dazzling cadenza.

The central slow movement is the set of variations: listen for the simple, songful theme stated at the start, then for the extraordinary variety of its transformations: by turns serene, glittering, agitated and mysterious, including a magical 'night music' variation. The finale is a dancing, driving transformation of the first movement's material (Bartók's symmetry at work), full of folk-rhythm exuberance and brilliance. Patricia Kopatchinskaja, a fearless and characterful soloist, brings the work both its lyricism and its wild, earthy edge.

Béla Bartók

1881–1945

Five Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Orchestra

THE COMPOSER

Béla Bartók was born in 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, then in the Kingdom of Hungary (today Sânnicolau Mare in Romania), and grew up to become one of the towering figures of twentieth-century music, and one of its great explorers. Trained as a pianist and composer at the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest, he was a formidable virtuoso who might have made his career at the keyboard alone. Instead, in the first decade of the century, he turned to the villages of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, later reaching as far as Algeria, recording peasant songs on wax cylinders and laying, with his friend Zoltán Kodály, the foundations of modern ethnomusicology. That fieldwork was not antiquarianism: the irregular metres, modal scales, and percussive vitality of the music he gathered passed directly into his own language, giving it a flinty rhythmic drive and an earthy modernity unlike anything in the Austro-German tradition he otherwise revered. Bartók loathed fascism: after 1933 he refused to give concerts in Nazi Germany and broke with his publisher there. As Hungary slid toward alliance with Hitler, he emigrated to the United States in 1940, settling in New York. The American years were hard, with failing health, financial anxiety and a sense of exile, yet they produced the radiant Concerto for Orchestra (1943) and the Third Piano Concerto heard tonight. He died of complications of leukaemia in New York on 26 September 1945, his Third Piano Concerto all but finished on his desk.

ABOUT THE WORK

Bartók was not only a great composer but one of the founding fathers of ethnomusicology: with his friend Zoltán Kodály he spent years travelling the villages of Hungary and beyond, recording and transcribing thousands of peasant songs on a wax-cylinder phonograph. That folk material became the lifeblood of his own music, and he also made many beautiful arrangements of the songs themselves. These Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and orchestra are drawn from his larger 1929 set of Twenty Hungarian Folk Songs for voice and piano; in 1933 Bartók orchestrated five of them for the alto Mária Basilides, who gave the first performance of the orchestral version.

In these settings Bartók treats the folk melodies with great care and artistry, preserving their authentic character while clothing them in subtle, colourful orchestral dress. They range from melancholy laments to lively, dancing numbers, offering an intimate, song-filled interlude between the grand concerto and the Spanish ballet. They also reveal the tender, deeply humane side of a composer often thought of as severe.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the directness and authenticity of the folk melodies themselves (these are real Hungarian peasant songs, with their distinctive modal inflections and speech-like rhythms) and for the sensitivity of Bartók's orchestration, which colours and supports the voice without ever overwhelming the simple tunes.

The set moves through contrasting moods: listen for the sorrowful, inward songs (laments of loneliness or sorrow) set against more animated, dance-like numbers full of rhythmic life. The mezzo-soprano (here Rinat Shaham) carries the songs; follow the words and the way Bartók matches the music to each text's character. It is a brief but rewarding glimpse of Bartók the folk-song collector and miniaturist, and a reminder of the roots from which his whole musical language grew.

Manuel de Falla

38 minutes

1876–1946

The Three-Cornered Hat (complete ballet)

THE COMPOSER

Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) was the greatest Spanish composer of the twentieth century, the figure who brought Spanish music to the centre of the European stage. Born in Cádiz, he spent formative years in Paris (where he absorbed the influence of Debussy, Ravel and Dukas) before returning to Spain and forging a style that fused the idioms of Spanish folk and flamenco music (Andalusian song, guitar figuration, dance rhythms) with the refinement and brilliant orchestration of the French school. His masterpieces include the ballets *El amor brujo* and *The Three-Cornered Hat*, the symphonic impressions *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, and the puppet opera *Master Peter's Puppet Show*. A meticulous perfectionist who left a relatively small output, he distilled the essence of Spain into music of extraordinary colour, rhythm and atmosphere. He died in exile in Argentina after the Spanish Civil War.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Three-Cornered Hat (*El sombrero de tres picos*) is de Falla's most exuberant and colourful work, a ballet bursting with the rhythms, colours and sunlight of Spain. It was one of the legendary productions of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*: premiered in London in 1919, with choreography by Léonide Massine and sets and costumes by none other than Pablo Picasso. De Falla expanded it from an earlier pantomime based on a popular Spanish novel, and the result is a brilliant comic tale. The story is a folk farce: a pompous, lecherous old magistrate (in his three-cornered hat of office) tries to seduce the beautiful, faithful

wife of a miller, with much chasing, disguise and humiliation, until the cocky magistrate is thoroughly mocked and the miller and his wife triumph.

De Falla's score is a feast of Spanish dance and atmosphere, scored with dazzling brilliance for a large orchestra, and punctuated by a mezzo-soprano who sings brief, flamenco-flavoured interjections. In the complete ballet (as opposed to the popular suites) we get the whole vivid sequence, including the famous final 'Jota' that brings the work to a riotous close. It is the perfect, sun-drenched conclusion to the concert.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, right at the start, for the burst of energy (a fanfare, shouts of 'Olé!' and castanet-clicks, with the mezzo-soprano's flamenco-style cry) that throws us straight into the heat and colour of Andalusia. Then follow the dances, which are the heart of the work. Listen for the sultry, swaggering **Farruca** (the Miller's Dance), one of de Falla's most famous pages, with its proud, stamping rhythm; for the graceful dance of the Miller's Wife; and for the comic, lumbering music of the pompous magistrate.

De Falla's orchestration is brilliant throughout: listen for the guitar-like figurations, the snapping castanets and percussion, the sultry woodwind solos and the blazing full-orchestra climaxes, all evoking the Spanish idiom with a Frenchman's precision of colour. The ballet builds to its tremendous **final dance (Jota)**, a whirling, exuberant celebration as the magistrate is tossed in a blanket and the lovers reunited, bringing the evening to an irresistibly festive close.

Tonight's artists

Patricia Kopatchinskaja *violin*

Bartók's Second Violin Concerto demands both soaring lyricism and wild, earthy energy, and few violinists inhabit that combination as completely as Patricia Kopatchinskaja. With her folk-musician background and her fearless, intensely characterful playing, she brings out both the rhapsodic Hungarian song and the spiky, dancing folk-rhythm in Bartók's score, making the concerto sound vivid, rooted and alive.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, born in Chişinău (then Soviet Moldova) in 1977 into a family of folk musicians, is one of the most individual and electrifying violinists before the public. Her family emigrated to Vienna when she was a child, and she trained there and in Bern. Famous for her fearless, theatrical, intensely physical music-making (she often performs barefoot), she is a passionate champion of new music and an unconventional interpreter of the classics, winning a Grammy in 2018. Her folk-music roots and her wild, characterful energy make her an especially compelling interpreter of Bartók, whose own music is steeped in the folk traditions of Eastern Europe.

Rinat Shaham *mezzo-soprano*

Rinat Shaham takes a double role tonight: the solo voice in Bartók's Five Hungarian Folksongs, where she carries the authentic folk melodies, and the brief, flamenco-flavoured vocal interjections that punctuate de Falla's Three-Cornered Hat. Her warm mezzo and her dramatic flair, honed in a career built on Carmen, suit both the Hungarian songs and the sultry Andalusian cries of the Spanish ballet.

Rinat Shaham is an Israeli mezzo-soprano, born in Haifa into a musical family and trained at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. She has sung at many of the world's leading houses and festivals, among them New York City Opera, the Berlin and Vienna State Operas, Aix-en-Provence and Glyndebourne, and is especially celebrated as Bizet's Carmen, a role she has performed hundreds of times internationally. Her warm, vibrant mezzo and her flair for the dramatic and the folk-inflected make her well suited both to Bartók's Hungarian songs and to the flamenco colour of de Falla.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Béla Bartók**

Kenneth Chalmers, Phaidon 2008

An illustrated life of Bartók that covers his folk-song collecting and the late 1930s, when he wrote the Second Violin Concerto.

ACCESSIBLE **Sacred Passions: The Life and Music of Manuel de Falla**

Carol A. Hess, Oxford University Press 2004

Carol Hess's biography of Manuel de Falla, with the story of *The Three-Cornered Hat* and its creation for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Bartók**

Amanda Bayley (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2001

Essays by leading scholars on Bartók's music, including his folk-music research and the concertos.

SOURCES

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4. Bartók's Second Violin Concerto: A Musical Farewell to Hungary, The Listeners' Club. <https://thelistenersclub.com/2020/09/28/bartoks-second-violin-concerto-a-musical-farewell-to-hungary/>
5. Five Hungarian Folk Songs, Boosey & Hawkes. <https://boosey.com/cr/music/Bela-Bartok-Five-Hungarian-Folk-Songs/3739>
6. Twenty Hungarian Folksongs, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty_Hungarian_Folksongs
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10. Simon Rattle, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Rattle
11. Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_Kopatchinskaja
12. Who is Patricia Kopatchinskaja?, BBC Music Magazine (classical-music.com). <https://www.classical-music.com/features/artists/who-is-patricia-kopatchinskaja>
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14. Béla Bartók, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780714847702>
15. Sacred Passions: The Life and Music of Manuel de Falla, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780195145618>
16. The Cambridge Companion to Bartók, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521660105>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-01-18-rattle>

Version 3, 30 September 2026