

Treviño: Messiaen, Illés and Rachmaninoff's Second

Thursday, January 29, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Robert Treviño, conductor · Patricia Kopatchinskaja, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MESSIAEN 1908–1992 <i>Hymne (au Saint-Sacrement)</i>	12'
2	ILLÉS b. 1975 <i>'Vont-tér' for Violin and Orchestra</i>	21'
3	RACHMANINOFF 1873–1943 <i>Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27</i>	60'
TOTAL MUSIC		93'

Olivier Messiaen

1908–1992

Hymne (au Saint-Sacrement)

THE COMPOSER

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) was one of the most original and influential composers of the twentieth century, a devout Catholic mystic whose music sought to express the eternal and the divine. For over sixty years organist at the church of La Trinité in Paris, he developed a wholly personal musical language built on his own ‘modes of limited transposition,’ complex rhythmic systems (drawn partly from ancient Greek and Indian sources), brilliant orchestral and harmonic colour (he experienced sound as colour, a form of synaesthesia), and, most famously, the transcription of birdsong, which he regarded as the music of God’s creation. His masterpieces include the Turangalila-Symphonie, the Quartet for the End of Time (written in a prisoner-of-war camp), and the vast opera Saint François d’Assise. As a teacher at the Paris Conservatoire he shaped a whole generation, including Boulez and Stockhausen.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Hymne au Saint-Sacrement (‘Hymn to the Blessed Sacrament’) is one of Messiaen’s earliest orchestral works, written in 1932 when he was just twenty-three, already the organist of La Trinité and already, unmistakably, himself. It belongs to a small group of early orchestral

12 minutes

'meditations' (with *Les Offrandes oubliées* and *Le Tombeau resplendissant*) in which the young composer first displayed his command of the orchestra and his lifelong subject: religious contemplation, here a hymn of adoration before the Eucharist.

The work has an extraordinary backstory: the original score was lost during the Second World War, and Messiaen reconstructed the entire piece from memory in 1946, a feat that shows both his prodigious musical recall and how much the work meant to him. Though early, it already shows the hallmarks of his style: glowing, sensuous harmonies, a free and flexible sense of rhythm and time, and an atmosphere of ecstatic, mystical contemplation that builds to a bubbling, sunny climax. It makes a luminous, devotional opening to the concert.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the slow, contemplative, almost timeless quality of the music: Messiaen is not interested in conventional momentum or development, but in creating states of spiritual contemplation. Listen for his rich, sensuous harmonies (the young composer already finding the glowing, 'coloured' chords that would define his style) and for the way the music moves in waves of adoration, alternating hushed mystery with radiant, surging climaxes.

Even in this early work, you can hear the essential Messiaen: the sense of music as an act of worship, the love of bright orchestral colour, and a rhythmic freedom that makes the music seem to float outside ordinary time. At around twelve minutes it is a concentrated, glowing meditation, a window onto the spiritual world that would occupy this singular composer for the rest of his life.

Márton Illés

21 minutes

b. 1975

'Vont-tér' for Violin and Orchestra

THE COMPOSER

Márton Illés (born 1975 in Budapest) is a Hungarian composer and pianist, one of the notable voices in contemporary European music. Trained in Győr, he went on to study in Basel (composition with Detlev Müller-Siemens) and in Karlsruhe with the influential Wolfgang Rihm, and he has won significant honours including the Ernst von Siemens Composer Prize. His music is known for its vivid, intricate, often kaleidoscopic textures and its imaginative exploration of instrumental sound and gesture.

ABOUT THE WORK

‘Vont-tér’ for violin and orchestra is a recent concerto-like work by the Hungarian composer Márton Illés, completed in 2019 and premiered by tonight’s soloist, Patricia Kopatchinskaja (the LSO notes that she gave the first performance with the WDR Symphony Orchestra in 2020). It features here as part of an LSO ‘Artist Portrait’ series spotlighting Kopatchinskaja, a violinist famed for her fearless advocacy of new music, and an ideal champion for a work of this kind.

Illés is a composer of intricate, imaginative sound-worlds, and the LSO describes Vont-tér as ‘an ethereal, playful work of kaleidoscopic sounds and effects.’ Contemporary violin writing of this sort tends to explore the full expressive and technical range of the instrument, with a whole palette of colours, textures and extended techniques alongside conventional melody, set against an orchestra used for atmosphere and shimmering detail rather than traditional accompaniment. As a relatively new piece it comes without the familiarity of the repertoire staples around it; it rewards open, curious listening.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Approach this one with fresh ears. Rather than waiting for hummable themes, listen for colour, texture and gesture: the ‘kaleidoscopic sounds and effects’ the LSO promises. Listen to the extraordinary range of sounds Kopatchinskaja draws from the violin (she is celebrated for exactly this kind of fearless, exploratory playing), and to how those sounds are mirrored, answered and coloured by the orchestra.

Listen, too, for the ‘ethereal, playful’ character: moments of delicacy and wit, shimmering textures, sudden contrasts. This is music about the interplay of the solo voice and the larger ensemble, about the discovery of new sonorities, and about atmosphere. Let it draw you into its strange and vivid world: a chance to hear a living composer’s music brought to life by the violinist who has made it her own.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1873–1943

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

THE COMPOSER

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) was the last great representative of Russian Romanticism, a composer of sweeping, melancholy lyricism and a piano virtuoso of legendary gifts. His early career was nearly derailed by the cata-

60 minutes

strophic premiere of his First Symphony in 1897, which plunged him into a years-long depression; he recovered, with the help of therapy, to write the hugely popular Second Piano Concerto, and went on to create the works for which he is loved: the piano concertos, the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, the symphonies, the songs and the great piano pieces. After the Russian Revolution he left his homeland forever, settling eventually in the United States and supporting himself largely as a touring concert pianist, composing far less but with undiminished mastery. His music's combination of long-breathed melody, rich harmony and deep, nostalgic emotion has made it among the most beloved of all.

ABOUT THE WORK

Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony is one of the glories of late Romanticism: a vast, glowing, intensely lyrical work that represents the composer's triumphant return to the symphony after disaster. His First Symphony had failed catastrophically at its 1897 premiere, sending him into a deep depression; a full decade later, having rebuilt his confidence (and living quietly in Dresden to escape the distractions of Russia), he produced this richly Romantic masterpiece. It was premiered in St Petersburg in 1908 with the composer conducting, and was an immediate and lasting success.

The symphony is everything its predecessor's premiere was not: assured, expansive and overflowing with the long, soaring melodies and dark, autumnal Russian melancholy that are Rachmaninoff's signature. At full length it runs close to an hour (Rachmaninoff thinks in broad, unhurried paragraphs), and it builds to one of the most famous slow movements in the repertoire, whose great clarinet melody is among the most ravishing tunes ever written. It is music to be luxuriated in: warm, passionate, nostalgic and ultimately triumphant.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony grows from a brooding motto in the low strings at the very opening, a germinal idea that recurs throughout the work, binding its huge span together. Listen for the first movement's slow, dark introduction giving way to a surging, melancholy main movement, full of Rachmaninoff's characteristic long-spun melody.

The second movement is a vigorous scherzo: listen for the striding horn theme and the energetic drive, with a broad, sweeping lyrical contrast and a chattering fugal central section. Then comes the glory of the symphony: the Adagio, opening with a great soaring melody in the violins and, soon after, the famous long clarinet solo, one of the most beautiful melodies in all mu-

sic, unfolding with seemingly endless breath. Let it wash over you. The finale is a blazing, festive movement that gathers up the symphony's themes (including a return of that ravishing slow-movement music) and drives, through surging climaxes, to a triumphant, bell-like close in the major, the hard-won affirmation of a composer who had once thought himself finished.

Tonight's artists

Patricia Kopatchinskaja *violin*

Patricia Kopatchinskaja gave the premiere of Márton Illés's 'Vont-tér', so this performance, part of an LSO portrait series devoted to her, places the work in the hands of the very artist who brought it into being. Famed for her fearless, exploratory approach and her command of the violin's full range of colours and effects, Kopatchinskaja is the ideal (indeed the originating) interpreter of this 'kaleidoscopic' contemporary concerto.

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.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Rachmaninoff**

Geoffrey Norris, Oxford University Press 2000

A compact life of Rachmaninoff with a guide to his music, including the Second Symphony written in Dresden.

ACCESSIBLE **The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century**

Alex Ross, Picador 2008

Alex Ross's history of twentieth-century music gives a lively picture of Messiaen and of the modern world in which a work like Illés's new concerto is written.

DEEPER **Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor**

Barrie Martyn, Routledge 2016

Barrie Martyn's study treats Rachmaninoff as composer, pianist and conductor, with detailed discussion of the Second Symphony.

SOURCES

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5. Symphony No. 2 (Rachmaninoff), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_\(Rachmaninoff\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_(Rachmaninoff))
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10. Rachmaninoff, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780198164883>
11. The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780312427719>
12. Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781138268012>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-01-29-trevino>

Version 3, 30 September 2026