

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Peltokoski: Rautavaara's First Concerto and Wagner's Ring

Sunday, March 1, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican

Tarmo Peltokoski, conductor · Yuja Wang, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	RAUTAVAARA 1928–2016 <i>Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 45</i>	20'
2	WAGNER 1813–1883 <i>The Ring: An Orchestral Adventure (arr. Henk de Vlieger)</i>	68'
TOTAL MUSIC		88'

Einojuhani Rautavaara

1928–2016

Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 45

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Rautavaara's First Piano Concerto, completed in 1969, is one of his most striking and exhilarating works, a piece that catches the composer at a fascinating turning point, as he moved away from the strict serialism of his earlier years toward the warmer,

more sensuous and freely tonal style of his maturity. The concerto fuses both worlds: it has the rigour and edge of modernism alongside surging, romantic sweep and glittering orchestral colour. It is also famous for one arresting, physical device: in places the pianist plays great tone-clusters not with the fingers but with the flat of the hand and the whole forearm, producing huge, resonant washes of sound. Far from a gimmick, this becomes a powerful expressive and colouristic tool, opening up a sonority somewhere between bell-peals and breaking waves.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, above all, for the famous cluster-chords: passages where the soloist plays with forearms and the flat of the hand to create massive, shimmering blocks of sound, like waves of resonance washing over the orchestra. The first movement (marked 'Con grandezza', or 'with grandeur') opens in exactly this grand, sonorous vein; listen for the sense of scale and the dialogue between the piano's washes of sound and the orchestra.

In the central slow movement, listen for a more mysterious, atmospheric mood (Rautavaara's gift for glowing, mystical colour), with the piano weaving delicate or brooding textures over the orchestra. The finale brings brilliance and drive, the writing more motoric and virtuosic. Throughout, listen for the blend of modernist edge

and romantic warmth that makes Rautavaara so distinctive: spiky, cluster-rich sonorities sitting alongside surging lyricism and rich harmony. And enjoy the sheer sound of the piece: its imaginative, often spectacular use of the piano and orchestra together, brought to life here by Yuja Wang's phenomenal technique and fearless musicianship.

Richard Wagner

1813–1883

The Ring: An Orchestral Adventure (arr. Henk de Vlieger)

68 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ('The Ring of the Nibelung') is the most colossal achievement in all opera: a cycle of four music-dramas (*Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*) that runs to some fifteen hours and took Wagner about a quarter of a century to compose. It tells a vast mythological saga of gods, giants, dwarves, dragons, heroes and river-maidens, all turning on a cursed ring of power forged from stolen Rhinegold, and building to the cataclysmic destruction of the gods' fortress, Valhalla. Its music is among the most revolutionary and influential ever written, built from a web of recurring leitmotifs (short musical themes attached to characters, objects and ideas) and orchestrated with unprecedented richness and power.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, right at the start, for one of the most famous openings in music: the deep, slowly stirring E-flat that emerges from silence and gradually builds into the rippling, surging music of the river Rhine, the primal source from which the whole cycle (and arguably the whole arrangement) grows. From there, follow the procession of great set-pieces and let the leitmotifs guide you: short, recognisable themes for the gold, the ring, the sword, the gods, the hero Siegfried, and so on, which recur and transform throughout.

Listen for the showstoppers everyone knows: the galloping, brass-blazing Ride of the Valkyries; the shimmering, flickering Magic Fire Music as Wotan surrounds the sleeping Brünnhilde with flame; the gentle, woodwind-rich Forest Murmurs; and the exhilarating sweep of Siegfried's Rhine Journey. Then listen for the tragic grandeur of the second half: the shattering, brass-laden Siegfried's Funeral March, and the vast, cathartic final scene, Brünnhilde's Immolation, in which the music gathers up the cycle's great themes and drives, through fire and flood, to a transcendent close as Valhalla burns and the ring returns to the Rhine. Even without voices, the orchestra tells the whole epic story; surrender to its tremendous sweep and colour.

Tonight's artists

Yuja Wang *piano*

Rautavaara's First Concerto demands both phenomenal technique and a fearless willingness to explore the piano's outer limits, not least its famous forearm-and-fist tone-clusters and its blend of modernist edge with surging romanticism. Yuja Wang, celebrated for her dazzling virtuosity, power and adventurous spirit, is an ideal champion for this thrilling and still under-played Finnish concerto, bringing it both brilliance and conviction.

Yuja Wang, born in Beijing in 1987, is one of the most dazzling and charismatic pianists in the world. Trained at the Central Conservatory in Beijing and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, she had her breakthrough in 2007 when, aged twenty, she stepped in for Martha Argerich with the Boston Symphony, and she has been a star of the concert platform ever since. An exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist and a Grammy winner, she is celebrated for a phenomenal, seemingly effortless technique, electrifying stage presence and fearless musicianship across a vast repertoire, with the great virtuoso Russian concertos among her specialities.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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