

Pappano: Britten, Bernstein's Age of Anxiety and the Pathétique

Sunday, May 10, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Denis Kozhukhin, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BRITTEN 1913–1976 <i>Sinfonia da Requiem, Op. 20</i>	20'
2	BERNSTEIN 1918–1990 <i>Symphony No. 2 'The Age of Anxiety' for piano and orchestra</i>	30'
3	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74, 'Pathétique'</i>	47'
TOTAL MUSIC		97'

Benjamin Britten

1913–1976

Sinfonia da Requiem, Op. 20

20 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The three movements run without a break. Listen first for the **Lacrymosa** ('weeping'), which Britten called 'a slow marching lament': it opens with a great hammer-blow on timpani and low strings, over which a grieving, swaying theme builds inexorably through wave after wave of intensity to a shattering climax: music of raw, oppressive sorrow.

This collapses into the **Dies irae** ('Day of Wrath'), which Britten described as 'a form of Dance of Death': listen for the frantic, flickering energy, the nervous fanfares and skittering rhythms, building to a violent, terrifying climax, a vision of war and destruction. Then, out of the chaos, comes the **Requiem aeternam** ('eternal rest'): listen for the magical transition as the music finds its way to calm, with a gentle, consoling melody on flutes over rocking harps and strings, Britten's hard-won 'fi-

nal resolution,' a benediction of peace after grief and terror. The whole work is a journey from lament through nightmare to consolation, and a remarkable achievement for so young a composer.

Leonard Bernstein

30 minutes

1918–1990

Symphony No. 2 'The Age of Anxiety' for piano and orchestra

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The work is in two parts, each in three sections. Listen at the very start (**The Prologue**) for two lonely clarinets in a falling duet, and then for the **The Seven Ages** and **The Seven Stages**, two sets of variations in which the solo piano leads the orchestra through Auden's characters' reflections on life and their dreamlike quest. Listen for how the piano weaves continuously through the texture, by turns reflective, brilliant and searching.

In the second part, listen for **The Dirge**, a dark, anguished lament (using a brooding twelve-note theme) mourning the loss of a strong father-figure or 'Colossus' to lean on. Then comes the famous **The Masque**: a wild, exhilarating jazz scherzo for piano and percussion, full of bebop energy and brittle brilliance, a frantic party that masks despair. Finally, **The Epilogue**: listen for the moment the piano falls silent and then re-enters, and for the way the orchestra builds, against the odds, to a blazing, affirmative climax: Bernstein's hard-won statement of faith and hope emerging from anxiety. It is a thrilling vehicle for a soloist like Denis Kozhukhin, and one of the great American symphonies.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

47 minutes

1840–1893

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74, 'Pathétique'

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens in gloom, with a solo bassoon over dark low strings, before the main Allegro erupts with nervous, agitated energy. Listen for the famous, soaring second theme, one of Tchaikovsky's most ravishing melodies, and for the shattering central development, where a violent eruption (with a quotation of the Russian Orthodox requiem) tears the music apart before the great tune returns, transfigured and consoling.

The second movement is a wistful, bittersweet waltz, but in an off-balance five beats to a bar, so it never quite settles: a dance with a limp. The third movement is a brilliant, driving march-scherzo that builds to such a triumphant, blazing climax that audiences often (mistakenly) burst into applause, thinking the symphony has ended in victory. But then comes the devastating finale: an Adagio lamentoso of utter despair. Listen for the wrenching, sobbing main theme (ingeniously split between the two violin sections), the brief surge of protest, the stroke of the tam-tam, and the way the music sinks, lower and lower, into the depths of the cellos and basses, fading to nothing, a heartbeat stopping. It is one of the most powerful endings in all music.



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